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Destabilizing Knowledge in Medieval Arabo-Islamic Society: Multiplicities and Wonder in Isfahani's *Kitab al-Aghani*

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Dedication

To my mother and father

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During the cultural and philosophical shift of 10th-century Arabo-Islamic society, Isfahani (d. 967) compiled his renowned, multi-volume anthology the *Book of Songs* (*Kitab al-Aghani*). In the *Aghani*, Isfahani curates four centuries of poetry and lore (*akhbar*). Among the chapters of the *Aghani* are those he devotes to 7th-century tragic love (*udhri*) poets, including Majnun Layla, Qays Lubna, Dhu 'l-Rumma Mayya, and Kuthayyir Azza. Within these chapters, the way in which Isfahani curates the source material foregrounds contradictions and ambiguities and toys with expectations of narrative linearity and finality. We find no comprehensive, authoritative narratives around the personalities in Isfahani's text. Instead, the *Aghani* disrupts the familiar features of popular stories and thwarts attempts to distill them into truisms.

Although scholars have long recognized the *Aghani* as a masterpiece of Arabic literature, they have generally confined it to the reference shelf as a source of facts. Scholarship on the *Aghani* has largely focused on its quality as a reliable reference and

often views the text's contradictions and ambiguities as byproducts of Isfahani's supposed commitment to accuracy.

This dissertation explores the literary quality of the *Aghani* in light of the cultural and philosophical transformation in which it was produced. I offer an approach to classical Arabic literature that embraces the postmodern concerns that are consistent with the cosmopolitanism of 10th-century Arabo-Islamic society. I draw upon Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the "rhizomatic" book and Bakhtin's theory of "dialogism" to demonstrate that Isfahani treatment of *udhri* lore calls attention to patterns and to fields of experience to which universal laws cannot apply. This orientation inspires pursuits of knowledge through wonder and produces a kind of knowledge that demands and cultivates a mind capable of thinking in multiplicities and contextualities.

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Introduction

In the 10th century, "a noticeable renaissance was in evidence" in Arabo-Islamic society that was characterized by "an autochthonous Islamic egalitarianism and humanism" (Ali, "Abbasid Public Sphere" 471) and it is during this cultural and philosophical shift that Abū 'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 967) compiles his renowned, multi-volume anthology the *Book of Songs (Kitāb al-Aghānī).* Iṣfahānī's project spans over 9,000 pages in its current form and curates four centuries of poetry, musical notes, and lore (*akhbār*, sing.: *khabar*) surrounding Arabic songs and Arabic-speaking poets. Iṣfahānī arranges this inherited knowledge into chapters, usually introduced by songs, each devoted to a particular poet, composer, or event. Among these chapters are those devoted to the narratives and poetry of 7th-century tragic love (*ʿudhrī*) poets, and this dissertation examines four such chapters of Iṣfahānī's *Aghānī*. In particular, I consider the way in which Iṣfahānī relates and curates *akhbār* around the stories of Majnūn Laylā, Qays Lubnā, Dhū 'l-Rumma Mayya, and Kuthayyir ʿAzza. These *ʿudhrī* love stories dramatize the all-consuming infatuation with an unattainable beloved that often leads to the lover's death. Within these chapters, the way in which Iṣfahānī curates the source material—poetry and narrative reports—foregrounds divergences and ambiguities and toys with expectations of narrative linearity and finality. We find no comprehensive, authoritative narratives

around the personalities of poets and composers in Iṣfahānī's text. Instead, the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* disrupts the familiar features of popular stories and thwarts attempts to distill these narratives into truisms.

PROBLEMATIZING THE FIELD

Classical Arabic literature in general has had a difficult reception in modern scholarship—one that spans from romantic fascination (J. Stetkevych, "Arabic Poetics") and overwhelming disgust to boredom (Sells, "Qasida"). The assumptions that emerged from this reception, it seems, underlie the difficulty scholars have had in appreciating and approaching the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* as literature. Michael Sells argues that in Euro-America, up until recently, the Arabic ode (*qaṣīda*) has been subject to stereotypes and arbitrary criteria for literary judgments, which led to conclusions that the *qaṣīda* itself is stereotyped and arbitrary. Sells's discussion of the literary engagement of classical Arabic literature focuses on the *qaṣīda* because a great deal of the scholarship in the field focuses itself on the *qaṣīda*, while relegating other literary genres as sources of historical reference. Classical Arabic literary genres based on *akhbār* pose a particular challenge to modern Euro-American aesthetic expectations. As such, scholars have tended to seek to tame the foreignness of *akhbār*-based genres through questions about the authenticity of *isnād*[1] and through historical approaches. Such approaches ignore the literary value of the

[1] *Akhbār* are usually made up of chains of transmitters (*isnād*), an authorizing technique much like the present-day use of footnotes or endnotes, which precede the anecdotal content (*matn*) they relate the path the *matn* took in reaching its ultimate compiler and thus

form and content and view literary concerns to be at odds with historical concerns, which they take to involve a preoccupation with fact-based accuracy.

The bulk of the studies that treat Iṣfahānī's *Kitāb al-Aghānī* involve efforts to tame the text and bring order to it by attempting to resolve internal divergences and to find and impose a conventional logic for its organization of narrative reports, chapters, and songs. Over the last two centuries, scholars have published abridgments, indices, descriptions, and translations of the text. Recent scholarship engaging *Kitāb al-Aghānī* tends to employ the text as a reference text for fleshing out the histories and biographies

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the audience. While the inclusion of *isnād* became essentially a necessity for *ḥadīth* texts as well as an important keystone for establishing authenticity, especially as they took on legal and legitimizing weight, the necessity and function of *isnād* in *akhbār* texts were not conventionally predetermined. Rather, the presentation of sources (*isnād*) of particular *matn* and their effect on the reception of the *matn* can be interpreted in diverse ways. While at times the *isnād* of *akhbār* texts, like *ḥadīth*, can appear to attempt to establish credibility and legitimacy, their employment can also offer more varied effects on the reception. At times, compilers of *akhbār* texts (*akhbāriyyīn*) include incomplete or labyrinthine *isnād* as well as *isnād* that propose impossible relationships between transmitters. As Beatrice Gruendler points out, *akhbār* raise "assumptions and expectations on the part of author and audience," and *isnād*, in supposing "a conventional truth claim," can undermine or raise doubt about that claim (90).

of the people and events it stages.[2] Hilary Kilpatrick's *Making the Great Book of Songs*, however, states an aim to treat *Kitāb al-Aghānī* as a work of "literature in its own right" (n.p.) and expresses surprise regarding "the paucity of studies of the *Aghānī* as a literary work (rather than as a source for social history, musical life, poetic criticism, diglossia, and a number of other topics)" (vii). Kilpatrick investigates the internal logic of the text, highlighting Iṣfahānī's skill in compiling, arranging, and commenting on the *akhbār*. While Kilpatrick's observations are both numerous and thought-provoking, her study focuses on practical concerns of compilation and organization and remains preoccupied with the truth/falsehood binary. Specifically, Kilpatrick, among others, argues that Iṣfahānī's extensive use of paratextual conventions such as *isnād*, far from undermining authority or foregrounding the text's status as a work of art, point to a "constant preoccupation" with accuracy (Kilpatrick, *Great Book* 111) and a concern that his text be "respected as a reliable, accurate transmission" (Binkley 153). As such, her work views ambiguities and divergences in *Kitāb al-Aghānī* as circumstantial byproducts of Iṣfahānī's presumed concern for accuracy.

Of course, there are also those scholars who view the *Aghānī*'s production of ambiguities and divergences as functionless vestiges of an irrelevant tradition, i.e., *isnād*, that contribute nothing to the historical, literary, or symbolic weight of the text. For example, in his introduction to his 1961 abridgment of the *Aghānī*, Ahmad Kamal Zaki explains that the *Aghānī* is "difficult…for the modern reader" due to its "*isnād*s…and re-

[2] See Khairallah and Khan

ports, which contradict each other, do not keep to the point and are not arranged chronologically" (qtd. in Kilpatrick, *Great Book* 5). In Hilary Kilpatrick's words, Zaki portrays "old texts" as "trackless waste in which the reader soon loses his way" (*Great Book* 5). In deeming the traditional function of *isnād* irrelevant, Zaki precludes the possibility that they might function in new ways in the text such that they consciously call into question their own function. The number of abridgments of the *Aghānī* that remove narrative divergences and *isnād* altogether suggests that other abridgers share this view.[3] In removing these elements of the text, these abridgers shy away from confronting Iṣfahānī's peculiar arrangement of *akhbār* and use of *isnād* in the *Aghānī*, which function to pose difficulty for the reader and make him "lose his way." Rather than addressing the questions raised by the text's peculiar mode, this approach conveniently erases such peculiarities, once again stripping the text of its artistic value and performative impact.

The scholars noted above, among others, such as Asʿad Khairallah and Ṭaha Ḥusayn (d. 1973), do back away at times from concerns of accuracy when celebrating the literary value of what is contained in the text and the stories of the *ʿudhrī* (tragic love) tradition in particular. In this celebration, however, the *Aghānī* itself is relegated to the reference shelf and allowed to function only as a source or documentation of literary works rather than as a work of literature in its own right. Thus, even as scholarship on the *Aghānī* as a source for the *ʿudhrī* tradition has trended towards interpretations of the stories within the text as "a literary work that fascinated people's imagination" (Khairallah

[3] See ʿAwn, Yūsuf, for example.

93), interest in the *Aghānī*'s production of ambiguities and divergences has been tossed aside as part and parcel of the prevailing, misguided interest in historicity and validity. Rather than incorporating these techniques into new, literary readings of the *Aghānī* and its presentation of these stories, the divergent *akhbār* are treated as raw material from which cohesive narratives of symbolic importance can be drawn.

At times these scholars attribute literary value to Iṣfahānī's *Aghānī* itself. In doing so, however, they presume an inherent, inescapable tension between literature and history. Kilpatrick, for example, attempts to approach the *Aghānī* as "a work of literature in its own right," but her study of the text nonetheless concludes that "accuracy may…be assumed to have been a constant preoccupation of [Iṣfahānī's] throughout the time he was working on the book" (*Great Book* 111). Thus, despite her aim to treat the text as literature, Kilpatrick imposes issues of objective accuracy and validity upon it. Although she deems Iṣfahānī's use of *isnād* in the text "modern," pointing to examples wherein the author consciously employs the technique of *isnād* "with his tongue in his cheek," ("Modernity" 252-3) she nonetheless views the author's literary (*adab*) interests, and "commitment to accuracy" as fundamentally incompatible (*Great Book* 45). By setting up Iṣfahānī as an author caught between two conflicting "urges"—to be faithful to historical accuracy and to include "representative material in the spirit of *adab*"—Kilpatrick frames ambiguities and apparent contradictions in the *Aghānī* as a byproduct of this dual focus, based on the premise that history and literature are inherently at odds with one another ("Genuine" 104-5; *Great Book* 43-45, 104-119). She further accuses scholars who seek to demonstrate Iṣfahānī's innovative use of narrative divergences, particularly ʿAbdullah al-

Simṭī, despite his claim to the contrary, of "ignorance of the true nature of literary conventions of classical Arabic prose compilations, and indeed of the literary culture of the time" (Kilpatrick, *Great Book* 11). That is, for Kilpatrick, whenever his commitment to accuracy can explain his choices as a compiler, further interrogation of those choices should be avoided in order not to draw interpretations inappropriate to the literary conventions of the text. However, it would appear that rather than conveying ignorance of the literary conventions of "classical Arabic prose compilations," al-Simṭī consciously breaks away from the limiting interpretative conventions of modernist scholarship of those prose compilations.[4]

The preoccupation of modern scholarship on the *Aghānī* with the text's presumed attempt to report poetry and lore with "accuracy" reflects a positivist and presentist approach to the text, along with other *akhbār* texts. This approach to the *Aghānī* seems to stem from its initial confinement to the reference shelf as a source of literary history rather than as a work of literature in its own right. ʿAbdullah al-Simṭī makes a similar observation about the scholarly reception of the text, pointing out that "we always confine [the *Aghānī*] to the framework of this limiting [historical, scientific] view" (108). Even

[4] Indeed, al-Simṭī begins his study of the *Aghānī* by declaring his conscious departure from the prevailing reception of the text: "The magic of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* is that it broke with and rendered ineffectual our historic (scientific) approach which we apply to sources of Arabic heritage…[nevertheless,] it is this [historical, scientific] view that is applied to the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*; however, I see [we should approach it] otherwise" (108).

when scholars set out to appreciate the text as literature, this conventional relegation continues to inform how questions of the *Aghānī*'s compilation and curation are addressed. In particular, these scholars admit, albeit indirectly, the effect of this unique compilation and curation of *akhbār* on the audience, but overlook their effect on the audience. In other words, while these scholars convey their own sensitivity to the text's *akhbār* arrangement and employment of *isnād*, rather than exploring those prominent characteristics of the text, they eliminate them as artistic concerns worth considering by explaining it away as a concern for documentational accuracy.

METHODS

The persistent positivist and presentist approach to *akhbār* texts tends to overlook the culture of *adab*[5] during the 10th century. In contrast to modern evaluations, judgments of narratives were not based on their perceived truthfulness in literal representa-

[5] *Adab*, a key term in classical Arabic literature, includes, as Samer Ali argues, not only "a corpus of varied literary knowledge…that a littérateur must know" and "the constellation of courtly manners and tastes to be conditioned and exhibited," but also often-overlooked social dimensions of acquiring, producing, and performing that corpus of knowledge, manners, and tastes (*Salons* 33). *Adab* knowledge belongs to Arabic knowledge (*ʿulūm ʿarabiyya*), which refers to the branch of knowledge that must be "personally transmitted" (*manqūla*) or else would be irretrievably lost (*Salons* 14). It is *adab* knowledge, knowledge that relies on and emerges from performance, in particular that I intend in my discussion of knowledge production in this dissertation.

tions of people and events, but rather on the artfulness of interpretations of people and events (Ali, *Salons* 5). Furthermore, the scholarship's preoccupation with literal representations of people and events discounts the skepticism, relativism of truth, and rejection of binary divisions that defined *adab* culture of 10th century Arabo-Islamic society (Kraemer xxviii; Ali 1).

While scholarship on *akhbār* sources, for the most part, continues to be largely occupied with questions of facticity and reliability, the work of Marshall Hodgson, Suzanne Stetkevych, Tayyib El-Hibri, and Samer Ali seeks to interpret and explore these literary devices and the narrative strategies at work in these sources. Hodgson, the celebrated author of the three-volume work *The Venture of Islam*, made great efforts to draw attention to the misguidedness inherent in imposing modernist notions of accuracy onto *akhbār* texts. His work reflects a keen awareness that for medieval "Islamicate" littérateurs, "accuracy as to 'fact' was much less important than validity as to life-vision" (Hodgson, "Two pre-modern" 62). In *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, El-Hibri continues in this vein in his consideration of how medieval Islamic historiography actively engages readers, narrators, and listeners to offer historical commentary. His study demonstrates how symbolism, allusion, innuendo, symmetry, and intertextuality convey authorial aims in ways that challenge the reader's perception of history and his or her place within it. Ali demonstrates in his study of Arabic literary salons that the *adab* culture of the classical period was inextricably linked to the culture of sociability and charm. Of particular interest here is Ali's theorization of a performer's responsibility to his audience, which often demanded both performance and textual adjustments in order to attract

and hold the audience's attention. These performative pressures, he suggests, "might be instrumental to understanding how banal, literal lives and events were transmuted into the artistic, figurative truths that have greater potential to move, persuade, and inspire" (Ali *Salons* 58). The concerns involved in transmitting knowledge, then, were not so much focused around perceived truthfulness in literal representations of people and events but rather on the artfulness of their figurative truths.

This dissertation builds on the work of these scholars. Following the lead of this "narrative turn," my approach employs methods that attend to the role of performance and the social production of knowledge in *adab* culture. By exploring the literary quality of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* in light of the cultural and philosophical shift in which it was produced, I offer an approach to medieval Arabic literature that embraces the postmodern concerns that are consistent with the cosmopolitanism of Arabo-Islamic society of the 10th century.

I also draw on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and their notion of the "rhizomatic" book, in particular. The "rhizomatic book," which they set in opposition with the rooted, tree-like book, is decentered and has multiple points of entry and exit. The rhizome is "always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo.*" (Deleuze & Guattari *Plateaus* 27). Like a rhizome, Iṣfahānī's text establishes connections between people, events, and thoughts, and the nomadic movements between them have no clear beginning or end. Conceiving Iṣfahānī's *Kitāb al-Aghānī* thusly as a rhizomatic book, I follow Deleuze and Guattari's invitation to ask not what a book means but instead how it functions and with what it functions (*Plateaus* 4) and to consider the impact of the

Aghānī on the audience and the ways in which it can function with its audience, 10th century Arabo-Islamic society, and the *ʿudhrī* tradition.

I also adapt Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of "dialogism." For Bakhtin, the author of a dialogic work draws in "languages of heteroglossia," i.e., voices that emerge from social, professional, temporal, and generic stratification, to indirectly express "his intentions and values," so that the author's creativity and originality lie in the combination of elements not in the elements themselves (291-92). The *akhbār* genre, much like the novel, foregrounds many perspectives in addition to that of the narrator, ingests other genres, and does not posit the authority of one perspective over others. Following Bakhtin's lead, then, I explore the interpretive possibilities of the way in which Iṣfahānī orchestrates a diversity of voices in the *Aghānī* in order to argue for an artistic function of the inclusion, arrangement, and orchestration of *akhbār* beyond "mere" contextualization, as some scholars suggest.

THESIS

While previous approaches to the *Aghānī* treat Iṣfahānī's work as a rich jumble that needs to be sorted out and needs to have its perceived extraneous appendages removed before literary interpretation can proceed, this dissertation considers the *Aghānī*'s full presentation of these *ʿudhrī* stories and, in particular, the literary function of the arrangement of *akhbār* including the *isnād*. I examine the way in which Iṣfahānī advances literary uses of the anecdotal (*akhbār*)-style texts in his *Kitāb al-Aghānī* and will explore the implications for reception of the text therein. I demonstrate that Iṣfahānī's text can be read as a rhizome through its "variation, expansion, and offshoots" (Deleuze & Guattari

Plateaus 27). The chapters devoted to the *ʿudhrī* poets offer variations on tragic love, expanding into stories on madness, sincerity, and authenticity, which in turn become explorations of the circulation and reception of cultural production. Each repetition of a song offers a variation—in the lyrics, narrative setting, or musical setting—and expands the poetic corpus and lore. Characters, poetry, and events overlap, creating offshoots and multiple entryways, and exits (Deleuze and Guattari *Plateaus* 226).

In drawing upon the work of Bakhtin, Deleuze, and Guattari, I demonstrate that Iṣfahānī's treatment of *ʿudhrī* lore calls attention to patterns and to fields of human experience to which universal laws cannot apply and thus produces a mode of knowledge that demands and cultivates thinking in multiplicities and relativities through which knowledge continues to be produced.

CHAPTERS LAYOUT

This dissertation considers Iṣfahānī's curation of *akhbār*, *isnād*, and poetry in the *Aghānī*'s chapters devoted to four *ʿudhrī* love poets and suggests that the text performs these stories as open, malleable, and unsettled. Part I, which comprises chapters 1 through 3, is titled "Mad Wonder." In it, I examine and compare two particular chapters of Iṣfahānī's *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, "The Lore and Lineage of Majnun of the Banu Amir" ("Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu") and "Narrations, Lineage, and Lore of Qays bin Dharih" ("Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi"), to exemplify the ways in which the text produces this kind of knowledge by provoking mad wonder in the audience. Titled "The Social Production of Knowledge," Part II comprises chapters 4 and 5 and explores the *Aghānī* chapters "Narrations and Lore of Dhu l'Rumma" ("Dhikr

Dhī ‘l-Rumma wa Khabarihi”) and “Narrations of the Lore and Lineages of Kuthayyir” (“Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi”) to argue that Iṣfahānī’s narration of these stories calls attention to the social production of knowledge through a play with ambivalence.

Chapter 1, which is titled “Iṣfahānī’s Invitation to Madness in the Story of Majnūn Laylā,” examines the *Aghānī*’s chapter on Majnūn Laylā (“Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu”) and departs from the view of the *Aghānī* as a verifiable source of poetry, histories, and biographies, instead making a case for a literary approach to Iṣfahānī’s text that is fitting with the concept of *adab*. The “Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu” confronts the audience with unresolving divergent knowledge about Majnūn, whose name means “Madman.” We are left not only wondering about his name, his origin, and his mental state, but also his being—does he even exist? I engage Deleuze’s articulation of difference and Bakhtin’s theory of “dialogism’ to consider the potential performative impact of Iṣfahānī’s selection, arrangement, and presentation of the voices of the *akhbār* and employment of *isnād* on audience that engages in the text. That is, I consider the relationship of Iṣfahānī’s text, a text that stages performance and inspires performance, with and its orientation toward its audience. The first half of this chapter examines the introductory section of the “Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu” to suggest that the line of questions we are compelled as an audience to ask about Majnūn implicates us in his madness and the madness of the text, as it disrupts and complicates that which appears most essential to his story and provokes us to wonder (*ʿajab*). The second half of the chapter further suggests that the introductory section of

"Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" frames knowledge not as certainty but as an emergent product and driving force of wonder that renders the passionate knowledge-seekers among us mad.

Chapter 2 is titled "A Touch of Something: The Story of Majnūn Laylā" and further explores the role of madness in "The Lore and Lineage of Majnun of the Banu Amir" ("Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu"). In "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu," Iṣfahānī constructs an impossible timeline in narrating the story of Majnūn and his descent into madness after falling in love with Laylā. We repeatedly encounter in this chapter a paradoxical refrain about Majnūn: "He was not majnūn, rather he had some *lawtha* (a touch of something) in him." In this chapter, I examine Iṣfahānī's presentation of time through *akhbār* and deployment of this phrase to suggest that it challenges audiences' assumptions and refocuses the question of madness toward *lawtha*, which I argue we might read as "a touch of something," "an in-betweenness," and "a socially contingent marker of difference" based on its deployment in this and other chapters of the *Aghānī*. Drawing upon Shoshana Felman's theorization of madness and writing, I argue that, in keeping with this notion of *lawtha*, Iṣfahānī presents madness as relative, socially contingent, and transitory in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu," such that it breaks down boundaries between madness and sanity and collapses cause and cure into one: the figure of Laylā.

Chapter 3, "Problematizing Rationality in Iṣfahānī's Qays Lubnā Narrative," contrasts the presentation of the Qays Lubnā story in the *Aghānī* with its narration of the Majnūn Laylā story. In Chapters 1 and 2, we see how Iṣfahānī presents Majnūn's story in

a "disordered" arrangement of divergent *akhbār.* In this chapter, I demonstrate how Iṣfahānī relates the Qays Lubnā legend, in contrast, as a straightforward, seemingly coherent chronologically-arranged narrative. As I point out, however, we also find that the stories of Qays Lubnā and Majnūn Laylā share narrative motifs, plot details, poetic verse, and distinctive phrasings in *akhbār.* Iṣfahānī's selection, arrangement, and presentation of *akhbār* and employment of *isnād* in "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" differ vastly from that of "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu," which I explored in Chapters 1 and 2. The collective narration that characterizes the majority of "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" is relatively free of divergences and reaffirms the audience's sense of the world and preconceptions, and its straightforward narrative seems to fly in the face of the *Aghānī*'s project of destabilizing authoritative knowledge. In this chapter, I examine the different narrative techniques Iṣfahānī employs in the *Aghānī* and their distinct effects on the audience, drawing again on Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic theory. I argue that this collective narration, along with Iṣfahānī's emphasis on the correctness of the *akhbār* and the theme of union in the story itself, seems to promote the knowledge of certainty and the cohesion of reason. I further argue that the way in which the type of divergence we encounter at the end "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" points to the absurdity that adherence to reason inevitably produces, undermining this mode of knowledge, and instilling a sense of mad wonder in the audience.

Chapter 4, "Reframing the 'Authenticity' of Dhū 'l-Rumma in the *Aghānī*" considers the concept of "authenticity" as a metaconcern in Iṣfahānī's portrayal of Dhū 'l-

Rumma in the *Aghānī*. The "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabarihi," confronts us with great ambivalence around the poetry attributed to Dhū 'l-Rumma, a famed Bedouin poet who problematizes poetry for the urbanizing Islamic society. I consider the receptive ambivalence Iṣfahānī relates around Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry and offer a reading of the text that suggests the *Aghānī* attempts not to resolve this receptive ambivalence but to appreciate his poetry's provocative in-betweenness. Engaging Bakhtin's theory of dialogism once again and Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the "rhizomatic book," I argue that Iṣfahānī's use of Dhū 'l-Rumma promotes an approach to poetry that foregrounds complexity and opens it up to a wider range of interpretation and inquiry. First, I suggest that the *Aghānī*'s review of the audience response to Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry conveys ambivalence among poets and scholars and calls into question the value of pure aesthetics. In the next section, I argue that the "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabarihi" connects this ambivalence with the question of Dhū 'l-Rumma's authenticity and rejects the validity of questions of authenticity, instead calling attention to the complexity of the notion of identity. Finally, I examine the stories of "false" attribution and plagiarism in the "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabarihi" to suggest the ways in which the chapter demonstrates that poetic style and skill, a poet's public persona, and the perception of the audience are all subject to change and alteration and dictate how poetry should be received and understood.

Chapter 5, titled "Sincerity in the Story of Kuthayyir ʿAzza," directly explores the way in which the *Aghānī* can be read as foregrounding the social production of knowledge in "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi." "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi," like "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabarihi," confronts the audience with great

ambivalence. The narrators in this *Aghānī* chapter stage the poet Kuthayyir as disingenuous, especially as a lover of ʿAzza, and transgressive toward social norms. Nevertheless, Iṣfahānī's orchestration of the narrators' voices in this chapter provokes skepticism in the audience towards Kuthayyir's critics and sympathy towards Kuthayyir himself despite his disrespect toward patriarchal tradition and societal norms, his bizarre behavior, and the doubts around his professed love for ʿAzza. Drawing further on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the "rhizomatic book," I examine this orchestration of voices in "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi" and argue that by redirecting criticism toward the critics and skeptics, Iṣfahānī leaves the question of Kuthayyir's sincerity open. I suggest that he dramatizes the skepticism around Kuthayyir to cast the figure of Kuthayyir in the role of an unavoidable reminder of the instability of narrative as a form of knowledge that claims to distinguish truth from mendacity and "sincerity" from deceit.

NOTES ON TRANSLATIONS AND TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM

Throughout this dissertation, I use the transliteration system of the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES) for all Arabic words and names with the exception of words that have entered the English language. In keeping with the IJMES system, I have indicated elision with the definite marker alif-lām (*al*) for strings of words and proper names to form contractions when appropriate without indicated sun letter assimilation. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Arabic texts are my own.

PART I: MAD WONDER

Chapter 1

Iṣfahānī's Invitation to Madness in the Story of Majnūn Laylā

O Qays, O Qays,

Did you drive me mad or were you driven mad?

Each of us blood, sleepless, in the end of the poem.[6]

- Qāsim Ḥaddād (b. 1948)

INTRODUCTION

"Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" ("The Lore and Lineage of Majnun of the Banu Amir") organizes knowledge of Majnūn in the form of *akhbār* (lore) that apparently contradict, and these *akhbār* begin to diverge from the moment the chapter opens: "He is—according to what those who scrutinized his origin and his story—Qays. It is said: Mahdī"[7] (Iṣfahānī 3; vol II).[8] This apparent contradiction in statements about

[6] Original text:

ويا قَيسُ يا قَيسُ/جَنَّنْتَنِي أَو جُنِنْتَ،/كِلانَا دَمٌ سَاهِرٌ فِي بَقايَا القَصيدَة.

[7] All translations of Arabic into English are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

[8] All references to page numbers of the *Aghānī* in this dissertation are, unless otherwise indicated, to the Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya edition.

Majnūn's name sets the tone of this *Aghānī* chapter, which is characterized by the morphing of knowledge. As the *akhbār* proceed, claims about the poet's name continue to diverge. In the first seventeen *akhbār* alone, we encounter five variations on his name: "his name is…Qays bin al-Malawwaḥ,…Qays bin Muʿādh,…al-Buḥturī bin al-Jaʿd,…al-Aqraʿ bin Muʿādh,…[and] Mahdī bin al-Malawwaḥ" (Iṣfahānī 3-7; vol II). Each of these names consists of a given name, e.g., Qays, and a patronymic, e.g., al-Malawwaḥ, which is indicated by the word "bin," meaning "son of." These narrative reports shuffle arrangements of various given names with various patronymics to form identity permutations for Majnūn, suggesting the continuous multiplication of his name-based identity.[9] We encounter given names that repeat (Qays and Mahdī) as do some patronymics (al-Malawwaḥ and Muʿādh). As such, we find certain given names matched with more than one patronymic, as with Qays bin al-Malawwaḥ and Qays bin Muʿādh, and certain patronymics matched with multiple given names, as with Qays bin Muʿādh and al-Aqraʿ bin Muʿādh. These permutations suggest a set of given names and patronymics from which new names can be born. Based on these examples, one might assume that these names are generated from a limited set of possibilities. However, in one example, both the given name and the patronymic are replaced by previously unmentioned names, i.e., Buḥturī bin al-Jaʿd. This inclusion of a completely unique name suggests not only the potential for further permutations of those already mentioned, such that al-Aqraʿ bin al-Jaʿd could

[9] As we will see in what follows, the unfixedness of Majnūn's identity is not limited to the identity indicated by names and extends to his origin, mental state, and actuality.

also perhaps be his name, but also for the potential introduction of new names that would generate unfettered permutations.

If we cannot know Majnūn through his name, perhaps we can come to know him in some other way. However, Iṣfahānī also confronts us with divergent knowledge with regard to his origin: some narrators say he is from the Banū ʿĀmir, some say he is not. One of the nobles of the powerful Quraysh tribe, Nawfal bin Musāḥiq's (d. 693), for example, related that when he "set out to collect [poetry?] from the Banū ʿĀmir, [he] saw the Madman" who recited for him (2: 5). The literary scholar al-Madāʾnī (d. 843) tells us that "the Madman (*al-majnūn*) famous among people for his poetry is the companion of Laylā, Qays bin Muʿādh of the Banū ʿĀmir (2: 5). The father of the Islamic scholar Ḥamād bin Isḥāq (d. 880) and the literary scholar Abū Ziyād al-Kulābī (d. 815) also tell us that "the Madman" (*al-majnūn*) was from the Banū ʿĀmir (2: 5, 6). At the same time, however, we hear twice from the narrator Ayyūb bin Abāya that when he "asked each clan of the Banū ʿĀmir tribe one by one about Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir..[he] didn't find anyone who" knew him (2: 4, 10). Ibn al-Aʿrābī also, for example, tells us that "a group from the Banū ʿĀmir were asked about the Madman (*al-majnūn*) and did not know him" (2: 10). We also learn very early on in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" that even Majnūn's identity as a madman is unfixed: some say he is mad, such as those narrators mentioned above who go so far as to deem him *the* Madman (*al-majnūn*), while others say he is not. Al-Aṣmaʿī in particular tells us directly that "he wasn't mad (*majnūn*), rather he had a touch of something (*lawtha*) in him" (2: 3).

After such divergent knowledge with regard to his lineage and his mental state, the audience encounters denials of Majnūn's very existence: "'The Madman' (*al-majnūn*) is a metaphor. It has no actuality. And there is no origin or lineage for him from the Banū ʿĀmir"[10] (Iṣfahānī 2: 10). After presenting pages of divergent *akhbār* about his name, origin, and mental state, Iṣfahānī raises the question of Majnūn's fundamental existence: he is a metaphor without actuality. In this way, Iṣfahānī presents questions about Majnūn's identity as interconnected, weaving them together in ways that escape resolution.

This foregrounding of difference characterizes Iṣfahānī's presentation of *akhbār* in this chapter of the *Aghānī*, and he achieves this characteristic emphasis on difference through the juxtaposition of divergent narratives. I refer to this technique as "performative friction," a term intended to call attention to the productive and adhesive function of plurality among unresolving divergent accounts in the form of both poetry and prose. By pointing to the performativity of this friction, I mean to call attention to two senses in which it functions. First, the resultant friction of these divergent accounts produces enigmas in each instance of reception. Second, this friction emerges from performance as a cultural practice, wherein the text both emerges from and presents itself for the performance of *adab* knowledge in literary salons and other venues. What effect do this "performative friction" and the enigmas it produces have on the story and on the audience's

[10] Original text:

المجنون اسم مستعارٌ لا حقيقة له، وليس له في بني عامر أصلٌ ولا نسبٌ.

experience of it? Why might Iṣfahānī destabilize our knowledge of Majnūn's identity or very existence?

Such questions become preemptively null and void for most scholars of the *Aghānī*[11] who tend to dismiss the possibility that "performative friction" in the text could serve artistic functions. Instead, these scholars take a positivist approach to the text in a way that excludes possible insights of other readings and limits interpretations of the text. This approach takes the competing *akhbār* to be evidence—even if deceptive or weak—of Iṣfahānī's true or feigned commitment to accuracy or a mere byproduct of that commitment. That is, they suggest that out of a desire to produce, or a desire to appear to produce, a reliable source of knowledge, Iṣfahānī employed the scholarly technique of *isnād* (chain of transmitters), and this practice inevitably resulted in narrative divergence, foreclosing the need to consider its performative effect. These evidentiary assumptions not only deny the *Aghānī* artistic value, they also necessarily dismiss possible literary readings of the text.

In engaging *akhbār*-narratives, scholars of classical Arabic literature have been reluctant to follow what Martin Kreiswirth terms the "narrativist turn" in the humanities. In his essay "Trusting the Tale," Kreiswirth chronicles the broad shift from a positivist approach to narrative as byproduct towards a "cross-disciplinary, theoretical concern with narrative as narrative" in the humanities over the past four decades (633). Samer Ali

[11] See Dawūd Sallūm, Walīd al-Aʿzamī, Hilary Kilpatrick (*Great Book*), ʾAbd al-Majīd Ayt ʿAbbū, ʿAbdullah ʿAli al-Sawiʿī

notes that while the mainstream of humanities has made the interpretation of narratives "as storied evaluations of people, places, and events" the norm, scholars in the field of classical Arabic literature and historiography tend toward a source-critical approach in which narrative is mined for "facts and details representing actual people, places, and events" (*Salons* 220). While, as Ali demonstrates, a narrativist trend is evident in the work of Suzanne Stetkevych, Tayyib El-Hibri, Marshall Hodgson, and others, which consider the performative and social aspects of *akhbār* texts*,* the majority of Middle East scholarship tends either to distill *akhbār* narratives into a set of facts or to view *akhbār* sources "as largely accurate and referentially truthful, with rare fanciful exceptions" (*Salons* 219).

While scholars have clearly afforded a literary function to the poetry and stories that they consider to be contained in but external to the *Aghānī*, they oddly deny such a function to the *Aghānī* itself and allow it to function only as reference documentation of literature. Considering the conventions of classical Arabic prose compilations, however, this conventional practice of scholarship on medieval Arabic literature, which separates form from content, becomes untenable. The medieval Arabic concept of *adab*, often translated as "literature," includes, as Samer Ali argues in his study of literary salons in medieval Islamic culture, not only the "varied literary knowledge…that a littérateur must know" and "courtly manners and tastes to be conditioned and exhibited," but also the social dimensions of acquiring, producing, and performing that corpus of knowledge, manners, and tastes (*Salons* 33). In relating *adab* knowledge, the *Aghānī* inevitably produces *adab* knowledge, and in collecting it, it necessarily performs it. The quality of such a per-

formance, as Samer Ali suggests, would be judged by "its impact expressed as audience reaction" (*Salons* 35). Thus, it is consistent with the conventions of classical Arabic prose compilations to consider the impact of Iṣfahānī's presentation of his *adab* knowledge on the audience. Furthermore, collections of *adab* knowledge, themselves a type of *adab*, were not only expected to entertain in such a way as to gain its audience's approval but were also commonly used as educational and didactic texts (Pellat n.p.). Thus, such collections served both to inform and relate *adab* knowledge to those seeking to acquire knowledge for performance in literary salons and other venues and to cultivate a particular kind of habitus.

If the *Aghānī* produces *adab* knowledge, what kind of knowledge is it, and what kind of knowledge do we find in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu"? If we take *adab* knowledge, and specifically the knowledge of *akhbār* texts, to require certainty and finality, as scholars of the *Aghānī* have implied,[12] the *Aghānī* would appear to present

[12] The expectation of certainty in knowledge to be gained from *akhbār* texts can be gleaned from the type of scholarly praise and criticism the *Aghānī* has received. As alluded to above, scholars tend to assess the *Aghānī*'s contribution according to the reliability of knowledge it contains. For example, Dāwūd Sallūm, praises Iṣfahānī's "precision (*diqqa*) and commitment (*ḥirṣ*) to faithful narration" as well as his attempt at "sound, unbiased criticism," which he estimates "make the Aghānī the most valuable, most reliable, and least exaggerated literary document in the Arabic language" (qtd. in al-Ṣawiʿī 259). Kilpatrick, similarly, argues that the *Aghānī* demonstrates Iṣfahānī's "commitment to ac-

Majnūn as thoroughly unknowable and to have failed grandly as a source of knowledge about the poet. But, being the longest of the chapters on the ʿ*udhrī* poets, "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" is replete with knowledge—the audience becomes privy to 95 pages worth of his stories and poetry. Moreover, the *Aghānī*'s retelling of the Majnūn Laylā story has been the version upon which later poets and storytellers drew, which speaks to its impact on cultural memory.

In considering the kind of knowledge we find in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" and the effect of what I refer to as the "performative friction," I draw on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome, as it offers a means to consider the effect of the kind of "multiplicities," "variation, expansion, conquest, and offshoots" (*Plateaus* 21) we find in this chapter, as well as Deleuze's articulation of difference. Deleuze and Guattari theorize the rhizome as "a continuous self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end" (*Plateaus* 22). As a multiplicity, the rhizome builds to a pitch of intensity without arriving at a resolution. Rather than resolving, the *akhbār* in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa

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curacy" (*Great Book* 45). In his criticism of the text, ʿAbd al-Majīd Ayt ʿAbbū also bases his assessment on its reliability. He argues that although many scholars in the field of adab and history consider the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* to be "one of the authoritative reference works for scientific (ʿ*ilmī*) and historic research" and "draw from its stories conclusions about religion, society, and history," the book "does not come close to being a reliable authoritative source or a scientific resource" (Ayt ʿAbbū n.p.).

Nasabuhu" multiply knowledge by affirming divergent "truths." For Deleuze, "the discovery in any domain of a plurality of coexisting oppositions is inseparable from a more profound discovery, that of difference, which denounces the negative and opposition itself as no more than appearances in relation to the problematic field of a positive multiplicity" (*Difference and Repetition* 255). Furthermore, the paradox of "the affirmation of both senses or directions at the same time," he theorizes, produces "a veritable becoming-mad" (*Logic* 1). A "sort of groping experimentation" is implied in the Deleuzian ethics of "immanence," which "resorts to measures that are not very respectable, rational, or reasonable" ("What is Philosophy" 41). That is, the production of paradoxes invites the discovery of difference and madness.

As I will argue, Iṣfahānī's arrangement of the *akhbār* and the particular way he employs *isnād* draw the audience's attention to the morphing of knowledge about Majnūn. The friction that results does not merely reflect a given reality but changes the audience's perception of reality through an unrelenting confrontation with unresolving divergences that demands a mind capable of thinking in multiplicities and relativities. As an audience, we find that the more we learn and the more we "know" of Majnūn, the less certain we become, and the more we are driven to wonder. Like the beloved of the *ʿudhrī* tradition, Majnūn is beyond our reach. Indeed, we are not able to "know" him as he is presented in the *Aghānī*, but Iṣfahānī's retelling of Majnūn's story nonetheless and perhaps precisely for that reason, provokes us to "get to know" him. The lover becomes the beloved, and the audience becomes the madman. In order to explore the way in which the *Aghānī* provokes us to madness, I make a case for a new reading of what I call the "per-

formative friction" in the Aghānī, adapting Deleuze's articulation of difference and paradox and Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of "dialogism." Using the Majnūn Laylā chapter as an exemplary case, I demonstrate that divergent knowledge in the story as retold by Iṣfahānī is used to perform a particular conception of knowledge—one that has the capacity to perceive multiplicities and that is both driven by and coalesces with insatiable wonderment. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, Iṣfahānī uses "performative friction" in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" to frame knowledge not as certainty but as wonder (*ʿajab*) that renders the passionate knowledge-seekers among us mad.

AN INVITATION TO MADNESS

The first ten pages of "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu," which comprise the introductory section to the chapter, present intense epistemological and ontological friction about the character at the center of it all—Majnūn of the Banū ʿĀmir tribe. The divergent *akhbār* dismantle the most fundamental knowledge about Majnūn's identity and existence. What is his name? Is he, as his nickname (*laqab*) suggests, mad? Is he one madman or many? Is he not a madman at all? Or is he simply not anyone to begin with? The line of questions we are compelled to ask implicate us in Majnūn's madness and the madness of the text; we become confused and our minds dis-ordered as we chase after what seems at times to be figments of imagination.

The *Aghānī* is a compound narrative, a dialogue of different voices confronting one another. We encounter the speech of diverse genres—prose, poetry, and *isnād*—and the speech of diverse speakers—Iṣfahānī, the many narrators, and the various characters. The audience also adds its songs to the plurality of voices in Iṣfahānī's narrative of

Majnūn Laylā, particularly as it places this narrative in interaction with the various versions of the romance that had been circulating in society mostly through oral transmission for over a century. How can, as Mikhail Bakhtin suggests, these diverse voices in diverse languages be understood to express Iṣfahānī's authorial aims "in a refracted way" (Bakhtin *Dialogic Imagination* 324)? And what effect does this refracted delivery have on the message of this literary work or its effect?

Drawing from Bakhtin's theory of "dialogism," we might look to identify its power in the centrifugal and centripetal forces between these different voices. For Bakhtin, the author of a dialogic work pulls in "languages of heteroglossia," i.e., languages that emerge from social, professional, temporal, and generic stratification, to indirectly express "his intentions and values," creating a kind of performative friction, so that the author's creativity and originality lie in the combination of elements not in the elements themselves (*Dialogic Imagination* 291-92). In the introduction to the *Aghānī*, Iṣfahānī proudly articulates his role in authoring the *Aghānī* as arranging *akhbār*, stories, characters, and tones in such a way that captivates the audience and drives wonder in it:

> It is the nature of the human to love moving from one thing to another and being delivered from the familiar and refreshed by newness. Every destination is more arousing than the place of departure. What is anticipated is more celebrated in the heart than what is present. So if these is true then what we have arranged is even more delightful and more admirable, offering the reciter, as he moves from one *khabar* to another, one story to another, ancient *akhbār* to modern *akhbār*, king to

subjects, seriousness to jest, the most spirited of readings and most arousing of page-turning of its diversities.[13] (Iṣfahānī 1: 5)

Iṣfahānī's conceives of artistic excellence as that which provides the pleasure of difference and diversity. Our natural attraction to newness that he identifies echoes the statement in the first book of the *Odyssey*, which observes that "men praise that song the most which comes the newest to their ear" (Homer 29). To achieve newness in his work, Iṣfahānī tells us that he exploits the variety of stories and songs in his hands in order to foreground difference. He invites the audience not only to spiritedness and arousal, but also to take note of this innovative approach to the *akhbār* form in which difference is foregrounded. Iṣfahānī arranges different voices—from ancient to modern, kings to subjects, serious to jesting—to arouse and satisfy what the heart desires. Taking his lead, then, and engaging Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, this study focuses on the way in which Iṣfahānī curates *akhbār* and toys with *isnād*. Iṣfahānī chooses the *akhbār* form, the most dialogic of available genres, and, as this study demonstrates, uses it to curate knowledge by creating ambiguities that do not coalesce to arrive at a singular point. As with Bakh-

[13] Original text:

طباع البشر محبة الانتقال من شيء إلى شيء، والاستراحة من معهود إلى مستجَدّ . وكل منتقل إليه أشهى إلى النفس من المنتقل عنه ، والمنتظر أغلب على القلوب من الموجود. وإذا كان هذا هكذا ، فما رتبناه أحلى وأحسن ، ليكون القارئ له بانتقاله من خبر إلى غيره ، ومن قصة إلى سواها ، ومن أخبار قديمة إلى مُحْدَثة ومليك إلى سوقة ، وجِدّ إلى هزل ، أنشط لقراءته وأشهى لتصفح فنونه.

tin's theory of dialogic discourse, no one voice prevails. Instead, the diverging voices that he produces in this way are thus in dialogue with one another, and he refrains from subordinating them with his own voice. On the contrary, Iṣfahānī actively subverts the authorizing potential of the *akhbār* form, while exploiting its destabilizing power.

The chapter begins with a parenthetical aside that breaks up the very first sentence, as if Iṣfahānī is unable or unwilling to directly state even Majnūn's name:

> [1][14] He is—according to what those who scrutinized his lineage and his story—"Qays." It is said: "Mahdī." The correct one is (*wa al-ṣaḥīḥ*) that he is Qays bin al-Malawwaḥ bin Muzāḥim bin ʿUdas, bin Rabīʿa, bin Jaʿda, bin Kaʿb, bin Rabīʿa, bin ʿĀmir, bin Ṣaʿsaʿa. His girlfriend Laylā's remark is among the indications that his name is Qays:
>
> Don't I wish I could feel when there are many calamities
>
> When Qays goes off, exiled, and when he is coming back[15]
>
> (Iṣfahānī 2: 3)

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[14] The numbering of *akhbār* is in accordance with the division markings of and order they appear in: Iṣfahānī, Abū 'l-Faraj, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. MS. TNI 538 - K. al-Maktaba al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Mamlaka al-Maghribiyya, Rabat.

[15] Original text:

هو على ما يقوله من صحح نسبه وحديثه قيسٌ، وقيل: مهدي، والصحيح أنه قيس بن الملوح بن مزاحم بن عدس بن ربيعة بن جعدة بن كعب بن ربيعة بن عامر بن صعصعة. ومن الدليل على أن اسمه قيسٌ قول ليلى صاحبته فيه:

In *khabar* 1, Iṣfahānī interrupts the first would-be statement—"He is Qays" (*huwa qays*)—with an imbedded *isnād* that distances him from it—who are these people that "scrutinized his lineage and story"? Why would his lineage and story call for scrutiny? Iṣfahānī hedges by framing and extending the short statement "He is Qays" as another's speech. Bakhtin argues in *The Dialogic Imagination* that "of all words uttered in everyday life, no less than half belong to someone else" because "in real life people talk most of all about what others talk about" (339; 338). Iṣfahānī's extensive use of *isnād* in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" stages this motif in human speech, and this framing of the first utterance of the chapter throws the audience into this world dominated by other people's speech. This hedging begins to cast doubt upon Majnūn's identity in its hesitation, anonymous sources, and suggestion of a need for scrutiny.

This doubt is compounded by the passive reported speech that follows, which suggests another name: "It is said: Mahdī." While the first statement identifies its source vaguely as "those who scrutinized his lineage and story," this piece of reporting completely omits the identity of the source, further mystifying Majnūn. The name "Mahdī," meaning "guided," evokes the image of the prophesied Mahdī, that is, the "Savior…whose expected return to rule the world will restore justice, peace, and true religion" (Arjomand), thus offering an antiphrastic facet for Majnūn, whose nickname (*laqab*) means "possessed by a jinn…and hence bereft of reason" (Lane 464). The name "Mahdī" not only

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ألا ليت شعري والخطوب كثيرةٌ

متى رحل قيس مستقلٌ فراجع

diverges with the statement that his name is "Qays" but also with the notion that he is "Majnūn" ("a madman"). The "dialogic overtones" of the utterance "Mahdī" offers "responsive reactions" to the assertion "Qays," as "every utterance must be regarded as primarily as response to preceding utterances in a given sphere" (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 91-92). Iṣfahānī's direct juxtaposition of these utterances, rather than instilling confidence, mystifies the audience with regard to Majnūn. This performative friction performs enigmas around and multiplies his identity.

After raising doubt and compounding it, Iṣfahānī tells us what the "truth" is, i.e., "that he is Qays, bin al-Malawwaḥ bin Muzāḥim bin ʿUdas bin Rabīʿa, bin Jaʿda, bin Kaʿb, bin Rabīʿa, bin ʿĀmir bin Ṣaʿsaʿa" (2: 2). The doubt and friction established in the opening lines gives this statement of "truth," which emerges without sources, a facetious tone and multiples truths rather than fixing it. Instead of offering sources, Iṣfahānī tells us indirectly that there is an "indication" (*dalīl*) that this is his "true" name and lineage. This indication, however, is tenuous, as it is indirect and relies on the presumption that the Laylā for whom the verse has been attributed is Majnūn's girlfriend. This tenuous indication and the foregrounding of doubt reflect back on the claim to "truth," which offers no more authority than a passive narrative. This dialogic expression is not finalized; "there is neither a first nor a last word" (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 170).

What follows constitutes the first substantial *isnād* of the chapter:

[2] Al-Ḥasan bin ʿAlī informed me that Aḥmad bin Zuhayr said: I heard someone—I don't remember who—saying: The Madman's[16] name is Qays, bin al-Malawwaḥ.[17] (Iṣfahānī 2: 3)

While this *isnād* attributes this *khabar* (*khabar* 2) to Aḥmad bin Zuhayr (d. 892) through al-Ḥasan bin ʿAlī (d. 670), it leads the audience, which is finally anchored by named sources, to a claim made by an anonymous, unmemorable narrator ("I don't remember who"). Even when we finally get a piece of knowledge substantiated by the claim to authority provided by *isnād*, it is imbued with a facetiousness effected through its own admission of uncertainty. In this *akhbār* 1 and 2, the audience learns that the kind of knowledge to be gained in the *Aghānī* of Majnūn is vast and diverse. We learn that he is Qays, or Mahdī, and a son of Malawwaḥ and among the Banū ʿĀmir. We learn that he is "al-Majnūn" (the Madman) but also known as "Mahdī" (rightly guided) and that Laylā was his girlfriends. At the same time, we learn that this knowledge morphs and relies on anonymous sources, tentative indications, and assumptions. The resultant friction invites a kind of madness that keeps the audience wondering, pursuing knowledge.

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[16] Translation note: Throughout my translations of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, I have chosen to give مجنون (*majnūn*) as "Majnūn" or "*majnūn*," depending on context and المجنون (*al-majnūn*) as "the Madman" (except when indicated otherwise).

[17] Original text:

وأخبرني الحسن بن علي قال حدثنا أحمد بن زهير قال: سمعت من لا أحصي يقول: اسم المجنون قيس بن الملوح.

In the *akhbār* that follow, knowledge begins to further branch out in divergent responses to the question of "Who is Majnūn?" not only in reference to his name, but also to his mental state, tribal affiliation, tragic love-affliction, and eventually his very existence in the world. The next four *akhbār* raise questions about these aspects of Majnūn's identity one by one:

> [3] He was not *majnūn*, rather he had a touch of something (*lawtha*)[18] in him like that of Abū Ḥayya al-Numīrī.[19] (Iṣfahānī 2: 3)
>
> [4] I asked each clan of the Banū ʿĀmir tribe one by one about Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir and did not find anyone who knows him.[20] (Iṣfahānī 2: 4)

In *akhbār* 1 and 2, Iṣfahānī raised questions about Majnūn's name, while at the same time indirectly indicating that he is mad (*majnūn*), from the Banū ʿĀmir tribe, and Laylā's companion. This next four *akhbār* (nos. 3-6) chips away at these suppositions. *Khabar* 3 denies his madness and redefines his mental defect: "He was not *majnūn*, rather he had a touch of something in him." This denial of his madness and assertion of a touch of some-

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[18] The term *lawtha* and the way in which Majnūn's madness is defined and redefined throughout the chapter is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

[19] Original Text:

لم يكن مجنوناً ولكن كانت به لوثة كلوثة أبي حية النميري.

[20] Original Text:

سألت بني عامرٍ بطناً بطناً عن مجنون بني عامر فما وجدت أحداً يعرفه.

thing else (*lawtha*) defamiliarize the audience with the Madman they expect to encounter. Majnūn's name implies madness, and this is a chapter devoted to, as indicated by its title, the lore of the Madman (*majnūn*) of the Banū ʿĀmir. To deny his madness, then, is to uproot that which appears most essential to the story. We cannot hold fast to our previous knowledge of Majnūn and are forced to incorporate into it apparent contradictions and revisions that continue the process of defamiliarization, leading us into a mad wonder[21]. This process of multiplying knowledge, producing a kind of performative friction, continues in *khabar* 4, which calls into question another assertion implicit in the chapter title, i.e., Majnūn's affiliation with the Banū ʿĀmir tribe. The narrator, Ayyūb bin ʿAbāya, reports seeking out knowledge of Majnūn only to find that no one from the Banū ʿĀmir tribe seems to know Majnūn. This *khabar* is framed as a quest or pursuit of knowledge of Majnūn and emphasizes the lack of knowledge around Majnūn both among the community and for the one who searches for knowledge.

> The *akhbār* of the introductory section continue to defamiliarize us with Majnūn:
>
> [5] I said to a man from Banū ʿĀmir: "Do you know the Madman and would you recite something from his poetry?" He said: "Have we exhausted all the poetry of the wise men, to the point that we are reciting the poems of the mad ones! Indeed, they are many!" So, I said to him: "I don't mean them. What I mean is Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir, the poet whom passion (ʿ*ishq*) killed." So he said: "Ha! Preposterous!

[21] As we will see in what follows, wonder is explained linguistically in the Lisān al-ʿArab as emerging from a process of defamiliarization.

(*hayhāt!*) The Banū ʿĀmir have more grit than that. However, this sort of thing is found among the Yemeni tribes who have weak hearts, feeble minds, and bald heads. But as for the Nizaris,[22] absolutely not."[23] (Iṣfahānī 2: 4)

In *khabar* 5, the quest continues, as Ibn Daʿb (d. 787) also seeks out knowledge of Majnūn. Not only does he not find someone who knows Majnūn, he is told that his search is "preposterous" because such feeble madmen do not exist among the Banū ʿĀmir. This performative friction raises a series of open questions: Why is Majnūn so difficult to find? Is it that he is not mad? Not from the Banū ʿĀmir? Not so "feeble" as to be killed

[22] The term "Nizār" can refer to the Banū Nizār bin Maʿadd tribe, descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad's eighteenth grandfather. However, as G. Levi Della Vida argues, by the end of the Umayyad period, "Nizār became the regular designation which was contrasted with Yamaniyya: henceforth the Banū Nizār were to be representatives of northern Arabs." (EOI2 "Nizār b. Maʿadd"). The man from Banū ʿĀmir with whom the narrator of this *khabar*, Ibn Daʿb (d. 787), speaks seems to use the term Nizār in this sense, that is, in contrast to those from the Yemeni tribes.

[23] Original Text:

قلت لرجل من بني عامر: أتعرف المجنون وتروي من شعره شيئاً؟ قال: أو قد فرغنا من شعر العقلاء حتى نروي أشعار المجانين! إنهم لكثيرٌ! فقلت: ليس هؤلاء أعني، إنما أعني مجنون بني عامر الشاعر الذي قتله العشق، فقال: هيهات! بنو عامر أغلظ أكباداً من ذاك، إنما يكون هذا في هذه اليمانية الضعاف قلوبها، السخيفة عقولها، الصعلة رؤوسها، فأما نزار فلا.

by love-sickness? Or perhaps he has been erased from Banū ʿĀmir memory for his unacceptable feebleness? Doe he even exist? Ibn Daʿb's search raises questions about Majnūn's madness, his tribal affiliation, and his terminal love-sickness, the most salient elements of his story. Who is it that he, and thus the audience, are looking for?

By destabilizing the familiar and emphasizing the unknown, Iṣfahānī provokes a sense of *ʿajab* (wonder, fascination) in the audience. In the *Lisān al-ʿArab*, Ibn Manẓūr (d. 1311) defines *ʿajab* as "the consideration of a thing that is unfamiliar (*ghayr maʾlūf*) and unusual (*lā muʿtād*)…and whose cause (*sabab*) is hidden (*khufiya*) and unknown (*lā yuʿlam*)" (2811). To wonder, then, might be to consider an unfamiliar thing of unknown origin. Iṣfahānī invites us to *ʿajab* as much as he invites us to consider Majnūn while simultaneously rendering him unfamiliar. The effect of *ʿajab*, as Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1753) suggests in his *Tāj al-ʿArus* is the "agitation or excitation of the soul (*infiʿāl al-nafs*)" (1: 731). Ibn Manẓūr equates the experience of *ʿajab,* (*taʿajjaba*) with that of the desire of renewed youth (*taṣabbā*) and of mad enchantment (*tafattana*) (Ibn Manẓūr 2812). *ʿAjab*, then, emerges from confronting the unfamiliar and agitates desire and madness in the soul. Our confrontation with Majnūn as unfamiliar, or defamiliarized, has the potential to excite youthful desire and mad enchantment in us, which are directed toward Majnūn as the object of fascination. At the same time, this youthful desire and mad enchantment to which we are called is also that with which Majnūn himself is associated. The narratives of Majnūn that were in circulation at the time of the *Aghānī*'s production, as suggested by the *akhbār* of the *Aghānī* itself and Ibn Qutayba's (d. 885) chapter on Majnūn in his book *al-Shiʿr wa al-Shuʿarāʾ*, stage the poet as a young boy who became

enchanted by a girl named Laylā and whose desire for her drove him to madness, as do the copious versions of the legend that appeared in later centuries. Our quest, like Majnūn's, is driven by wonder and touched by madness.

In *khabar* 6, al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 828) suggests why this search to know Majnūn may seem so difficult:

> [6] Two men are not known in this world at all except by a name: Majnūn Banū ʿĀmir and Ibn al-Qirriyyah. Rather, storytellers and reciters of poetry (*al-ruwāh*) gave birth to them (*waḍaʿahumā*).[24] (Iṣfahānī 2: 4)

One of the greatest authorities on pre-Islamic literature and culture, al- Aṣmaʿī tells us that Majnūn is known only by name (*ism*). Deriving from *s-m-w*, suggesting elevation, and/or *w-s-m*, suggesting marking, the word al- Aṣmaʿī uses for name, *ism*, indeed denotes "a means of raising into notice the thing denoted thereby, and making it known" (Lane 1435). He rejects Majnūn's materiality, while affirming his existence as a name. It is through his name—"Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir"—that Majnūn's persona takes form. Abū l-ʿAbbās explains that a name is "a trace (*rasm*) or a mark (*sima*) that is imposed upon the thing by which it is known" (Ibn Manẓūr 2109). The "thing" upon which this *ism* Majnūn is imposed, according to al-Aṣmaʿī, is the collection of narratives and poetry the narrators create and call "Majnūn." In denying his material existence in this world, al-Aṣmaʿī elevates (*yusmī*) Majnūn to a concept and affirms the diverse diction we have encountered as

[24] Original Text:

رجلان ما عرفا في الدنيا قط إلا بالاسم: مجنون بني عامر، وابن القرية، وإنما وضعهما الرواة.

audiences. The name "Majnūn" is the organizing tool for a legendary identity that transcends the idea of a material, historical being and the means through which his story spread and expanded.

After deconstructing the audience's knowledge of Majnūn, Iṣfahānī throws us into a spiral of affirmations, denials, repetitions, redefinitions, and revisions of what came before, creating a mise-en-abyme effect. His name, origin, madness, and existence are thus interwoven. Each question leads us back to a previous question and into a maddening infinite regress:

> [7] I set out to collect from the Banū ʿĀmir and saw the Madman. I was brought to him, and he recited for me.[25] (Iṣfahānī 2: 5)
>
> [8] The Madman famous among the people for his poetry is Laylā's companion Qays bin Muʿādh from Banū ʿĀmir and then from Banū ʿUqayl. He's one of the Banū Numayr, son of ʿĀmir bin ʿUqayl. He said: "There is another man among them called Mahdī bin al-Malawwaḥ from Banū Jaʿda, son of Kaʿb bin Rabīʿa bin ʿĀmir bin Ṣaʿsaʿa."[26] (Iṣfahānī 2: 5)

[25] Original Text:

سعيت على بني عامر فرأيت المجنون وأتيت به وأنشدني.

[26] Original Text:

These two *akhbār*, which seem to affirm his existence and affiliation with the Banū ʿĀmir, immediately follow denials of his material existence and affiliation. Iṣfahānī curates the *akhbār* so that we encounter these affirmations in light of the previous denials, that is, as part of this diverse, unresolving knowledge. He defamiliarizes Majnūn with this performative friction, extending the sense of wonder. The revisions of previous knowledge as contained in the *akhbār* do not lead us in one particular direction. That is, the *akhbār* do not build toward simple affirmation or denial, but rather the qualification of one with the other, inviting us to approach knowledge as multitudinous and relative.

The next *khabar* (*khabar* 9) diverges with the previous affirmations (*akhbār* 7 and 8), and *khabar* 10 proceeds to offer nuance, revision, and divergence to that, continuing the spiral:

> [9] Majnūn's stories and poetry were given birth to by a man (*waḍaʿahu fatan*) from Banū Umayya who loved one of his paternal cousins. He was loath to reveal what was between them, so he gave birth to (*waḍaʿa*) the stories of the Madman and the poetry that people would recite and attribute to the Madman.[27] (Iṣfahānī 2: 5)

المجنون المشهور بالشعر عند الناس صاحب ليلى قيس بن معاذ من بني عامر، ثم من بني عقيل، أحد بني نمير بن عامر بن عقيل، قال: ومنهم رجل آخر يقال له: مهدي بن الملوح من بني جعدة بن كعب بن ربيعة بن عامر بن صعصعة.

[27] Original Text:

[10] The name of the Madman is Qays bin Muʿādh, one of the Banū Jaʿda son of Kaʿb bin Rabīʿa bin ʿĀmir bin Ṣaʿsaʿa.[28] (Iṣfahānī 2: 5)

Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 819), the narrator in *khabar* 9 rejects Majnūn's material existence and echoes al-Aṣmaʿī's claim in *khabar* 6 that Majnūn's poetry and stories were created by someone else. Specifically, Ibn al-Kalbī offers an anonymous origin among the Banū Umayya for the persona of Majnūn, suggesting that because the unnamed boy created the stories, the identity of Majnūn does not belong to him. Majnūn belongs not to the material world but the world of legends, he proposes. *Khabar* 10, however, wrenches us back into the material world by anchoring his identity in a name presented in patronymic form that extends back to the Banū ʿĀmir bin Ṣaʿsaʿa, a presentation of lineage that challenges and responds dialogically to the other extended patronymic in *khabar* 1. As the *akhbār* alternate between affirmations, denials, revisions, repetitions, and redefinitions, wherein one qualifies the other, the affirmations and denials themselves diverge. Each time Majnūn's material identity is affirmed, that identity is altered, and when it is denied, the denial takes on diverse qualifications.

حديث المجنون وشعره وضعه فتىً من بني أمية كان يهوى ابنة عم له، وكان يكره أن يظهر ما بينه وبينها، فوضع حديث المجنون وقال الأشعار التي يرويها الناس للمجنون ونسبها إليه.

[28] Original Text:

اسم المجنون قيس بن معاذ أحد بني جعدة بن كعب بن ربيعة بن عامر بن صعصعة.

A repetition of this denial of Majnūn's madness follows these divergent *akhbār* about Majnūn's materiality, and it is also attributed to al-Aṣmaʿī. This iteration of the denial not only becomes a qualification but also an affirmation of the cause of his particular madness and his name:

> [11] He wasn't Majnūn, rather he had a touch of something (*lawtha*) in him, which was caused by the passionate love (*ʿishq*) that had possessed him. He loved a woman from his tribe called Laylā. His name is Qays bin Muʿādh.[29] (Iṣfahānī 2: 6)

This *khabar* concludes with the assertion that his name was Qays bin Muʿādh, and the next six *akhbār* continue to riff on the question of name and origin:

> [12] His name is Qays bin Muʿādh.[30] (Iṣfahānī 2: 6)
>
> [13] His name is Qays bin al-Malawwaḥ. ʿAmr al-Shaybānī said: "A man from the people of Yemen told me that he saw him and approached him to ask about his name and his origin. He said that he is Qays bin al-Malawwaḥ."[31] (Iṣfahānī 2: 6)

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[29] Original Text:

لم يكن مجنوناً، بل كانت به لوثةٌ أحدثها العشق فيه، كان يهوى امرأةً من قومه يقال لها ليلى، واسمه قيس بن معاذ.

[30] Original Text:

اسمه قيس بن معاذ.

[31] Original Text:

[14] He is Qays bin al-Malawwaḥ. His father died before he became disordered in the mind. So, he sacrificed his *nāqa* (female camel) on his father's grave and recited:

Upon the grave of al-Malawwaḥ I slaughtered my nāqa
In Dhu al-Sarh when his relatives shunned him
I said to her: "Be slaughtered, for I am
A man who walks tomorrow, while yesterday I was a rider"
May God not take you away, O Ibn Muzāḥim
Everyone must no doubt drink from the cup of death.[32] (Iṣfahānī 2: 6)

[15] His name is al-Buḥturī bin al-Jaʿd.[33] (Iṣfahānī 2: 7)

اسمه قيس بن الملوح، قال أبو عمرو الشيباني: وحدثني رجل من أهل اليمن أنه رآه ولقيه وسأله عن اسمه ونسبه، فذكر أنه قيس بن الملوح.

[32] Original Text:

أباه مات قبل اختلاطه، فعقر على قبره ناقته وقال في ذلك:

عقرت على قبر الملوح ناقتي بذي السرح لما أن جفاه الأقارب
وقلت لها كوني عقيراً فإنني غداً راجلٌ أمشي وبالأمس راكب
فلا يبعدنك الله يابن مزاحمٍ فكلٌّ بكأس الموت لاشك شارب

[33] Original Text:

اسمه البحتري بن الجعد.

[16] His name is al-Aqraʿ bin Muʿādh.[34] (Iṣfahānī 2: 7)

[17] His name is Mahdī bin al-Malawwaḥ.[35] (Iṣfahānī 2: 7)

The question "Who is he?" becomes increasingly more complicated. What "he" are we even talking about? Is he defined by a name? a madness? an origin? a story? Through reiteration and variation, the text interrogates knowledge and what it means to know, complicating attempts to find order in the chaos. *Akhbār* 10-14 seem to build toward reconciliation: he is Qays, they suggest, perhaps the son of Muʿādh or perhaps the son of al-Malawwaḥ; he was not mad, rather he had a touch of something (*lawtha*) in him. By *khabar* 14, we feel we almost have reached some sort of resting place at his father's grave, only to be wrenched away and thrust back into an uncertainty from which there is no escape.

These divergent affirmations in *akhbār* 12 through 17 demand from the audience the cultivation of a mind capable of maintaining difference without reducing it to the

[34] Original Text:

اسمه الأقرع بن معاذ.

[35] Original Text:

اسمه مهدي ابن الملوح.

"logic of the same."[36] The performative friction of the introductory section for "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" does not produce simple contradiction. Contradiction would imply that these *akhbār* directly negate one another, but they do not. Rather, they produce multiple roots. In foregrounding uncertainty through performative friction and choosing to present divergent knowledge rather than diverse knowledge that ends up converging in resolution, Iṣfahānī suggests the value of multiple truths. The notion that the affirmation of difference emerges from the coexistence of what appears to be oppositions but evades dialectical resolution plays a key role in Deleuze's articulation of difference in *Difference and Repetition*. Deleuze's "discovery of difference" emerges, like *ʿajab*, from the confrontation with the unfamiliar and agitates madness. "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" sustains the irresolution of these affirmations by repeatedly defamiliarizing Majnūn, thus sustaining the pursuit and the sense of wonder it drives.

Iṣfahānī presents knowledge of Majnūn not as a static body of facts but as an active process of inquiry, where questions breed more questions. Reading the *Aghānī* is an experience—a "spirited" and "arousing" experience—in which we remain in pursuit of Majnūn, despite questioning his existence. Indeed, the denials of his madness and existence are wrapped up in this provocation to wonder, as wondering requires an encounter with the unfamiliar. As the linguist Abū Isḥāq al-Zajjāj (d. 923) says of the origin of the

[36] The "logic of the same" refers to what Todd May calls the delusion that masks difference, a delusion, he argues that Derrida and Deleuze, among others, try to find ways of avoiding (2).

word ʿ*ajab* in the *Lisān al-ʿArab:* it emerges from "a person considering that which he denies and is rare" (Ibn Manẓūr 1956). This wonder, in turn, cultivates a kind of madness.

WONDER AS A MODE OF KNOWLEDGE

In classical Arabic literature, we find great resonance with the notion that knowledge has the power to capture us as would an object of infatuation (ʿ*ajab*). In his comprehensive study of the conceptualizations of knowledge in medieval Islam, Franz Rosenthal dedicates a chapter to knowledge as a societal force in which he chronicles the associations between pleasure and knowledge in medieval Islamic thought. He notes how Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmirī (d. 991) and al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1023) drew upon Aristotle and Plato to equate pleasure (*ladhdha*) with knowledge (ʿ*ilm*) (Rosenthal, *Knowledge* 241).[37] The cultural and intellectual shift of 10th-century Arabo-Islamic society, within which Iṣfahānī produced his *Aghānī*, included a "conscious attempt to assimilate and transmit the intellectual legacy of Greek antiquity" (Kraemer vii). Engagement with this legacy, then, likely informed 10th-century adaptations of the ʿ*udhrī* tradition. In articulating the

[37] In his *Kitāb al-Saʿāda*, al-ʿĀmirī (d. 991) cites Aristotle's conception of "pleasure as knowledge" (qtd. in Rosenthal, *Knowledge* 241). Al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1023) reports Plato saying: "the psyche has two pleasures: a pleasure that is independent of the body and pleasure that is shared with the body. The pleasure that belongs only to the body is ʿ*ilm* [knowledge] and *ḥikma* [wisdom] and the pleasure that the body partakes in is food, drink, etc" (2: 36)

way in which Plato's Dialogues embed love in knowledge, James Davidson synthesizes Plato's notion of an enterprising love of knowledge as one that consists "of a reaching out for knowledge, but not of pinning it to the ground" (267). "This embedding of love in knowledge," he explains, "is the reason why the lover and the beloved who 'go all the way' are 'without philosophy'" (Davidson 267). This is the approach to knowledge taken in a proverb recorded in al-Mubashshir's (d. 1106) 11th-century *Mukhtār al-Ḥikam wa Maḥāsin al-Kilam* (*Selection of Dicta and Sayings*): "One continues to remain knowing as long as one seeks knowledge; if he thinks that he knows, he has become ignorant" (333).

There are parallels between this approach to knowledge and Majnūn's love for Laylā as presented in the *Aghānī*. Iṣfahānī's contemporary, Abū Hilal al-ʿAskarī (d. 1005) explains knowledge (*ʿilm*) as pleasure: "Since we've come to know the pleasure of knowledge, neither sweetness nor delight excites wonder in us"[38] (426). This echoes the effect Laylā has on Majnūn, who takes no interest in food, conversation, or women except as they relate to Laylā. When asked by a group of women what he loves most after Laylā, he replies: "By God, nothing else excites me to wonder at all" Iṣfahānī 1: 67). *ʿUdhrī* love overshadows all such delights, just as the pleasure of knowledge can render all else impotent to provoke wonder.

[38] Original text:

ومذ عرفنا لذة العلم لا يُعجبنا الحلوُ ولا العذب

The term "excitement to wonder" (*yuʿjib*) that al-ʿAskarī employs above is also the term that appears throughout the *Aghānī*'s chapters dedicated to the ʿ*udhrī* poets. When a group of women ask Majnūn what about Laylā "excited him to wonder," for example, he replies: "Everything I've seen, witnessed, and heard from her excites me to wonder" (Iṣfahānī 72: 5). The root ʿ*-j-b* suggests wonderment, amazement, admiration, arousal, and delight. In the ʿ*udhrī* tradition, words derived from this root are most commonly employed by both narrators and poets to stage the initial infatuation of the lover with his beloved. The experience of "wonder" is what drives the lover toward his beloved, who may, as does Majnūn in this introductory section, coyly tease the lover. It also appears throughout the chapters on ʿ*udhrī* poets in reference to positive audience response upon hearing poetry. When Marwān bin al-Ḥakam ʿUmar bin ʿAbd al-Raḥmān bin ʿAwf (d. 653) was out collecting charity taxes, for example, he noticed Majnūn—before his madness had taken hold—and spoke with him. When Majnūn sang some poetry for him, "he was struck with wonder by him, and so he asked him to go out with him, and Majnūn agreed" (Iṣfahānī 2: 17). Iṣfahānī stages ʿUmar bin ʿAbd al-Raḥmān pursuit of Majnūn, which is provoked by wonder, as a lover's pursuit.

This wonder drives ʿUmar bin ʿAbd al-Raḥmān to pursue Majnūn as a lover would.

While Majnūn pursues Laylā, the audience pursues Majnūn, whose stories and poetry instill this sense of wonder. Iṣfahānī places certain knowledge of Majnūn beyond our reach. Like that of Majnūn, our pursuit does not end. Rosenthal points out that *adab* anthologies such as the *Aghānī* "remained a favorite arsenal from which all those longing for a general education, for the prestige going with being considered an educated person,

could draw their ammunition" (253). For the compiler of such anthologies, then, the potential impact of his presentation of *adab* knowledge meant he had the opportunity to cultivate in his audience his particular approach to that knowledge. Beyond selecting and curating *akhbār* to bolster one particular political, social, or religious group, the compiler can select and organize literary conventions to promote ways of approaching knowledge. Iṣfahānī's introduction to "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" implicitly asks, "What does it mean to know?," and responds "To become mad and remain in constant pursuit of knowledge." In doing so, Iṣfahānī creates a kind of knowledge that operates like ʿ*udhrī* love, provoked by wonder and conveyed by madness.

The method to Iṣfahānī's madness as compiler is this invitation to madness itself. Most printed editions of the text imply he collected this *akhbār* according to topic by offering subheadings for groups of *akhbār*.[39] In the Ḥayʾa al-Maṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb (The General Egyptian Book Organization) edition, for example, editor al-Najdi Nasif adds tags on the printed margins that attempt to organize the *akhbār* chronicled above into the following categories:

akhbār 1-2: "His lineage and scrutinizing his name"

khabar 3: "It is said he had a touch of something (*lawtha*) in him and was not Majnūn"

[39] As Kilpatrick points out, the Dār al-Kutub edition places "the indications of subjects…in the body of the text, thus giving the impression that they belong in the original *Aghānī*" (*Great Book* 3).

akhbār 4-8: "Narrator's disagreement about his existence"

akhbār 9-17: "It is said that a boy from Banū Umayya created his story and poetry and attributed it to him"

In the Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya edition, editor ʿAbd al-ʿAlī Muhannā offers no category for the first three akhbār and chronicles the rest of the introductory section as follows:

akhbār 4-10: "Narrator's disagreement about the existence of Qays and his madness"

akhbār 11-21: "Difference of opinion regarding the Madman's (*al-majnūn*) name"

Manuscript copyists, however, did not include any such indications of subjects in the extant manuscripts examined by me or Kilpatrick.[40] This attempt by later publishers to bring order to the text by dividing it into cohesive, discrete subjects suggests the discomfort Iṣfahānī engineers by cycling through topics, weaving them together, and thwarting resolution. Rather than extracting, collecting and grouping *akhbār* topic-by-topic, finishing with one and moving onto the next, he strings us along, returning to old questions that

[40] This observation is based on my consultation of four manuscripts: Iṣfahānī, Abū 'l-Faraj, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. MS. TNI 538 - K. al-Maktaba al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Mamlaka al-Maghribiyya, Rabat; Iṣfahānī, Abū 'l-Faraj, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. MS 1069, Ragıp Paşa. Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul; Iṣfahānī, Abū 'l-Faraj, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. MS 926, Yeni Cami. Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul; Iṣfahānī, Abū 'l-Faraj, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. MS 868-1, Hüsnü Paşa. Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul.

take on new meanings and implications. He satisfies our human desire to "move from one thing to another," so that even when we return to an earlier question, we feel "refreshed by newness" (Iṣfahānī 1: 5).

Robert Irwin points out that "one of the leading features of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* was its stress on *ṭarab*, a kind of ecstatic loss of self-control, as the ultimate goal of music and poetry" (213). Musicians and poets can bring about such a heightened state of emotion in their audience in part through repetition and variation. By cycling through subjects, Iṣfahānī is able to tap into this play with openness and closure associated with *ṭarab.* Refrains start to emerge, such as "He is Qays, son of al-Malawwaḥ" and "He wasn't Majnūn, rather there was a touch of something (*lawtha*) in him like that of Abū Ḥayya al-Numīrī;" and variations appear: "He is Qays, son of Muʿādh" and "He wasn't Majnūn, rather he had a touch of something (*lawtha*) in him, which was caused by the passionate love (*ʿishq*) that had possessed him." This repetition and variation continues and morphs, generating performative friction in the remaining fifteen *akhbār* of the introductory section, heightening the sense of disorder and infecting the audience with its own "touch of something" ("*lawtha*").

Iṣfahānī concludes the introductory section of "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" with a disclaimer, releasing himself of accountability for the authenticity of Majnūn's poetry and *akhbār*:

> I mention some of what has come to me from a nice group of *akhbār* about [Majnūn] while cleared of (*mutabarriʾan min*) accountability (*ʿuhda*) for it. Certainly, some narrators attribute much of the mentioned poetry in his *akhbār* to

> someone else, and those who relate his *akhbār* attribute it to him. Having presented this stipulation, I am immune (*bariʾtu*) from the blame of censurers and those looking to find fault.[41] (Iṣfahānī 2: 11)

This disclaimer, a rare moment in the text when Iṣfahānī explicitly acknowledges his presence, implies that what he has to offer is not credible *akhbār* but rather lies in his orchestration, selection, and organization of the *akhbār*. Iṣfahānī divests himself of any "accountability" (*ʿuhda*). The term *ʿuhda* denotes not only "a written statement of a purchase…one recurs to…on an occasion of doubt" but also a fault, defect, or weakness of the intellect (Lane 2183). A legal opinion from the Maliki jurist Saḥūn (d. 855) suggests this double sense of *ʿuhda*, implying both accountability and fault that transfer from one party to another:

> There is no three-day or year-long *ʿuhda* of the loaned slave or the borrowed slave, or the slave given for reconciliation, or the absent slave sold by description, or the slave taken as a payment of debt, or the slave used for sex, or the slave given as compensation…" (al-Qaṭarī 13: 348).

When one party transfers ownership of a slave another, the slave's faults and accountability for those faults are also transferred. Iṣfahānī's declaration that he is cleared of *ʿuhda*

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[41] Original text:

وأنا أذكر مما وقع إلي من أخباره جملاً مستحسنةً، متبرئاً من العهدة فيها، فإن أكثر أشعاره المذكورة في أخباره ينسبها بعض الرواة إلى غيره وينسبها من حكيت عنه إليه، وإذا قدمت هذه الشريطة برئت من عيب طاعنٍ ومتتبع للعيوب.

for the presented group of *akhbār* also implies that he claims to be cleared of the fault/mental weakness in them, which recalls al-Aṣmaʿī's qualification that Majnūn had "a touch of something" (*lawtha*) in him. The text, like Majnūn, is infected with mental defect, and in clearing himself of that defect and accountability for it, he transfers it onto the audience. Rather than promising to uncover the truth or presenting the truth as something that can be uncovered, Iṣfahānī is stoic and calm amidst the utter confusion into which he has thrust us. As Asʿad Khairallah argues, the irony of Iṣfahānī's serious tone here is particularly palpable when considered alongside his use of divergent *akhbār* and playful *isnād* (54). He says, "Because of the obvious contradictions between the texts (*amtān*, pl. of *matn*) of the various reports," he argues, "the isnād has a double, self-contradictory function: it purports to establish truth of a certain report, but succeeds in forfeiting its own validity" (Khairallah 54). In this way, the isnād produces its own sort of performative friction. The *isnād* for *akhbār* 3 and 6, for example, both include al-Riyāshī reporting through al-Aṣmaʿī, while the narrative content of these reports diverges. Iṣfahānī's claim of neutrality, Khairallah points out, only engenders further doubt:

> Comparing both statements…, one cannot help reaching the conclusion that someone along the chain of this *isnād* must have invented something. And my belief, in this connection, is that Iṣfahānī himself, refined artist that he was, is the last to be exempted from all responsibility, in spite of his plea for innocence. (54)

Indeed, to read the *Aghānī*, and particularly this chapter, as a "veritable storehouse of information" (Stern 501) or unprocessed raw material is to deny Iṣfahānī his artistry and

decline his invitation to know too much, to be excited to wonder, and to enter into the madness of the text.

Iṣfahānī's "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" sets the audience onto an intoxicating chase in these first seventeen *akhbār*. The Bahraini poet Qāsim Ḥaddād's (b. 1948) lyrical response to it offers a sense of this reception of the text, as it conveys the wonder-provoking and maddening effect of the section's use of performative friction, which drives Ḥaddād not only to madness but to wonder and "delight":

> He is Qays. And he is Muʿādh bin Kulayb, and he is Qays bin Muʿādh al-ʿUqaylī, and he is al-Buḥturī bin al-Jaʿd, and he is al-Aqraʿ bin Muʿādh, and he is also al-Mahdī. It was said his name is the Qays bin al-Malawwaḥ, from the Banū ʿĀmir tribe. When asked about him, those clans denied him one by one: "Baseless. And how!" Then it was said he was no one. He went through life with an unrequited heart (*qalb mafqūd*) and robbed of mind (*ʿaql maʾkhūdh*).
>
> Iṣfahānī told us—based on what he heard from one of the storytellers, who was a liar, and thus we believed (*fa-ṣaddaqnāhu*)—about a man who could see invisible people. He said: "There are three men who never were and never were known (*lam yakūnū qaṭṭu we lā ʿurifū*): Ibn Abū-l-ʿAqib, the author of *The Epics*, Ibn al-Qiriyya, and Majnūn of the Banū ʿĀmir." As for us, we saw our *akhbār* about him in paper scraps tossed around by copyists and celebrated him in our dreams…We were pleased by the juiciest parts of the stories taken from Abū Miskin, al-Shaybānī, Abū Isḥāq, al-Jawharī, al-Riyāhī, Ibn Shabbah, al-Madaʿini, al-Muhallabī, and al-Aṣmaʿī, though the author of the *Aghānī*, who gave us great

doubt about our preconceptions (*atāḥa li-ẓanninā shāsiʿ al-shakk*); we took full advantage (*fa-ihtabalnāhu*)…We made our choices among their seductions and exchanged our own choices with them, adding to them how we liked. It delighted the Madman. And he delighted us.[42] (Ḥaddād n.p.)

In Iṣfahānī's text, we discover a kind of knowledge, full of paradoxes and chaos, characteristic of performative friction, that drives wonder and that we can access only through a type of madness. Ḥaddād's retelling of the introduction to "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu," which he titles "Surely he is no one" ("*Innahu Lā Aḥad*") understands Iṣfahānī's text as a delightful mind play, which Ḥaddād conveys by recreating this play through unresolving voices ("He is Qays. And he is Muʿādh bin Kulayb, and he is Qays bin Muʿādh al-ʿUqaylī…"), puzzles ("he is no one"), inversions ("who was a liar, and

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[42] Original text:

هو قيس، وهو معاذ بن كليب، وهو قيس بن معاذ العقيلي، وهو البحتري بن الجعد، وهو الأقرع بن معاذ، وهو المهدي وقيل اسمه قيس بن الملوح من بني عامر ولما سئلت عنه بطون بني عامرٍ بطناً بطناً أنكرته وقالت (باطل وهيهات)، ثم قيل إنه لا أحد ذهب في حياته بقلبٍ مفقودٍ وعقلٍ مأخوذ أخبرنا الأصفهاني عن أحد الراوة وكان كاذباً فصدقناه، عن رجلٍ يرى غيب الناس قال كثلاثة لم يكونوا قط ولا عرفوا، ابن أبي العقب صاحب قصيدة الملاحم، وإبن القرية، ومجنون بني عامر أما نحن فقد رأينا أخبارنا عنه في رقعٍ أسقطها الوراقون واحتفت بها الأحلام...ولذ لنا ما يحلو من الأخذ عن أبي مسكينٍ والشيباني وأبي إسحاقٍ والجوهري والرياشي وابن شبة والمدائني والمهلبي والأصمعي عن صاحب الأغاني، الذي أتاح لظننا شاسع الشك فاهتبلناه... فانتخبنا من غواياتهم، وتبادلنا معهم الأنخاب، وزدنا في ذلك كما نهوى، فطاب للمجنون ذلك واستحليناه

thus we believed"), chaos ("we saw our *akhbār* about him in paper scraps tossed around by copyists"), and relativities ("the truest of lies"). Iṣfahānī "gave us great doubt about our preconceptions," and as Ḥaddād shows, bends our minds to consider multiplicities. The list of affirmed names for Majnūn brings to mind the performative friction of Iṣfahānī's text around Majnūn's name and prompts the audience to read the title ("It is that he is no one"/"*Innahu Lā Aḥad*"), which is repeated in the text itself, as he is many, that is, he is the repetition of differences.

As a reader, Ḥaddād's confrontation with the performative friction of the diverse knowledge Iṣfahānī arranges drives him into Majnūn's madness. This madness leads him to acquire a particular kind of knowledge: that Majnūn is no one. That is, he is not one individual but many, a multiplicity. It is a knowledge that is attained through an openness to multiplicity, which imbues in him a strong sense of wonder: "It delighted the Madman. And he delighted us." Indeed, these first seventeen *akhbār* with which we come into contact in the introductory section not only provide us with diverse knowledge about Majnūn's name, origin, and madness, leading us to question Majnūn's very existence, but also compel us to question our confidence in our knowledge and to manage the complexity, paradoxes, and relativity of that knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The question of who or what is Majnūn is an open one in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu." Iṣfahānī presents Majnūn in pieces of narrative in prose and poetry that unsettle preconceptions of Majnūn's identity and escape resolution. The "performative friction" of the introductory section forces the audience to overcome the dualism in-

herent in questions such as: Is his name Qays or not? Is he mad or not? Is he real or not? Does he exist? The puzzle of Majnūn, with which we are presented, can be solved by thinking in multiplicities and relativities, and it is a knowledge characterized by multiplicities and relativities that we gain from the text. Iṣfahānī transfers responsibility of authority to us by compelling us to doubt narrators and the authorizing function of *isnād* and by divesting himself of any "accountability" for the text's mental defect (*ʿuhda*).

Indeed, the text, like Majnūn, is infected with mental defect, and in turn, invites the audience to approach it with a touch of madness. Like the Deleuzian ethics of "immanence," what Iṣfahānī's text calls for is the pursuit of "the Madman." It is a pursuit fueled by the confrontation with the unfamiliar (*ʿajab*), mirroring Majnūn's mad pursuit of Laylā. The introductory section of "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" invites us to become mad, as the type of knowledge to be gained from this chapter requires the mind to be altered in some way, to be infected with some "*lawtha*," the implication of which I explore in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2

A Touch of Something

The Story of Majnūn Laylā

INTRODUCTION

As we have seen in Chapter 1, having been invited to become mad, the audience, like Majnūn, is especially susceptible to the transformative, performative potential of language and speech in "The Lore and Origin of Majnun of the Banu Amir" ("Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu"). After inviting us into madness, however, Iṣfahānī keeps framing and reframing *majnūn*/Majnūn in paradoxical ways and stages *junūn* (madness) as diverse and multi-faceted.

The notion of madness is immediately complicated in Iṣfahānī's narration of Majnūn's story. Iṣfahānī addresses Majnūn's madness in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" even before raising questions about the poet's historicity. The first divergence among *akhbār* in the chapter revolves around Majnūn's status as a madman. While the second *khabar* implicitly confirms this status ("The Majnūn's name is Qays bin al-Malawwaḥ" (Iṣfahānī 2: 3), al-Aṣmaʿī challenges this label outright in the *khabar* that

follows*:* "He was not Majnūn, rather he had some '*lawtha*'[43] in him like the '*lawtha*' of Abū Ḥayya al-Numīrī" (Iṣfahānī 2: 3). The pronoun "he" here refers to Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir, from whom the chapter gets its title. Thus, this *khabar* not only diverges from what came before but also diverges internally.

This puzzling *khabar* appears in altered form throughout the text. Three such *akhbār* appear within the first seventeen of the chapter,[44] each of which is attributed to al-Aṣmaʿī, and it appears three more times in the narratives that follow these introductory *akhbār*. Furthermore, as the story unfolds, Iṣfahānī continues to reframe Majnūn's madness and to complicate the question of what it is to be mad in various ways. Iṣfahānī presents *akhbār* that use diverse terms to refer to madness. Narrators describe Majnūn as having "lost his reason," "become wild," "become muddled," and "become confused." Furthermore, the cause and cure of madness overlap. The mention of Majnūn's beloved Laylā and his poetry are at times what causes him to lose his reason or become muddled, while at other times, they are what brings his reason back.

The positivist approach to the *Aghānī*, as discussed in the Introduction, would seek to pin down madness in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" in order to tame the text. Iṣfahānī's presentation of the *akhbār* here, however, makes madness very

[43] The Dār al-Kutub Al-ʿIlmiyya edition of the *Aghānī* gives both the words *lawtha* and *lūtha* in the body of the text in each instance discussed here, which it indicates by double-voweling.

[44] See *akhbār* 3, 11, and 19

difficult to pin down. Attempting to do so, then, would foreclose analysis of the divergence and performative friction with which Iṣfahānī confronts us. Exploring instead the question of why Iṣfahānī confronts us with this divergence and performative friction and its performative effect, I propose, produces a more productive approach to Iṣfahānī's presentation of madness in this chapter of the *Aghānī*.

In approaching madness in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" in this way, I draw once again upon Bakhtin's theory of "dialogism" to consider not only the ways in which Iṣfahānī composes "languages of heteroglossia" to indirectly express "his intentions and values" (*Dialogic Imagination* 291-92) but also how he arranges *akhbār* and poetry to mediate Majnūn's "pure and direct expression of his own intention" by the diverse languages of the text (*Dialogic Imagination* 285). I also engage Shoshana Felman's work on the issue of madness and literature, in which she examines literary texts for which questions of the "meaning" and "sense" of madness "do not permit a simple, unambiguous answer" (*Writing and Madness* 252-3). She suggests that we might be able to "define the very specificity of literature as that which suspends the answer to the question of knowing whether the madness literature speaks is literal or figurative" (253). That is, we might approach literature and consider the ways in which it is able to blur the boundaries between madness as symptom and as metaphor, or more specifically, "between psychosis and stereotype" (253).

In Felman's consideration of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, she demonstrates the way in which the novel's critical reception reproduces the thematic concerns of the story itself, wherein the "scene of the critical debate is…a repetition of the scene

dramatized in the text" (*Writing and Madness* 148). It is in the reading of the text, she suggests, that the text "acts itself out" (*Writing and Madness* 148). Because *The Turn of the Screw* itself "fails to mean," and instead dramatizes the "very functioning of meaning as division and as conflict" through "a clash of meanings," *The Turn of the Screw* engenders "a conflict of interpretations, a critical debate, and discord precisely like the polemic that surrounds" because it "fails to mean," and instead dramatizes the "very functioning of meaning as division and as conflict" through "a clash of meanings," (159). The text's openness, that is, implicates readers in its scandal, not only at the time of its publication, but with each reception.

We have seen in Chapter 1 the way in which the first seventeen *akhbār* of "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" foreground such a "clash of meanings," which produces a sort of performative friction that similarly invites the reader into its thematic concerns, namely madness and wonder. As an *akhbār* text, the *Aghānī* not only relates the story of Majnūn Laylā but also layers of critical response through narrators who have been pulled into the madness of the pursuit of the out-of-reach Majnūn, intertwining the story and the response to it, such that we cannot tease out one from the other.

As I argue in this chapter, Iṣfahānī's invitation to the audience to enter into the madness of the text as demonstrated in Chapter 1 is integral to the notion of madness that is at play in this story. This invitation blurs the boundaries between what is inside and outside the text and what is inside and outside of madness. That is, the text implicates the audience in its madness and the madness of Majnūn's pursuit while also compelling it to participate in the rhetoric of madness—is Majnūn mad?—and thus questioning its own

madness. Drawing upon Shoshana Felman's theory of the "reading-effect," I argue that Iṣfahānī constantly frames and reframes madness throughout "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu," staging it as ubiquitous and relative in such a way that confronts the audience with a culture subsumed by madness and toys with cultural normativity.

"HE WAS NOT MAJNŪN"

Al-Aṣmaʿī's declaration—"He was not Majnūn, rather he had some '*lawtha*' in him like the '*lawtha*' of Abū Ḥayya al-Numīrī " (Iṣfahānī 2: 3)—calls attention to the polyvalence of the word "*majnūn*" and the extent to which Majnūn's name, identity, and even existence are inextricably linked to the question of his madness. As a descriptive adjective—"mad"—it implies a character trait, as a noun—"madman"—it implies a generalized, identifying trait, and as a name—"Majnūn"—it functions as a totalizing marker of his identity and existence. The polyvalence of this challenge continues to reverberate, even as the second clause of the *khabar* focuses the challenge on his madness: "rather he had some '*lawtha*' in him like the '*lawtha*' of Abū Ḥayya al-Numīrī" (Iṣfahānī 2: 3).[45] This clause qualifies the challenge and draws the term "*majnūn*" toward the first sense indicated above: "mad." It invokes the aspect of "*majnūn*" that implies madness, however, only to challenge its applicability to Majnūn, and in doing so, the challenge in the clause topples over all senses of "*majnūn*." If he is not mad, surely he is no madman, and thus he is not "*majnūn*." Challenging his madness becomes a challenge to his identity and existence.

[45] See *khabar* 3

The seemingly self-contradictory nature of the first clause of the *khabar*—"He was not Majnūn"—raises questions about the soundness, or madness, of such a challenge and the distinction between what is and is not mad. In providing the name of the poet as "Majnūn" in the chapter title, Iṣfahānī asserts a community in which Majnūn's *M*/*majnūn*-ness is taken for granted. He is *the* poet of the Banū ʿĀmir known for his madness. He is *the* madman. We also learn, however, that "he was not *majnūn*" (Iṣfahānī 2: 3). Iṣfahānī's presentation of Majnūn equates to a paradox and a complication of accepted knowledge: "Majnūn was not majnūn." Trinh T. Minh-ha reminds us that, at least for a modern-day audience, "those who run around yelling that X is not X and X *can* be Y usually land in a hospital, a rehabilitation center, a concentration camp, or a res-er-vation [sic.]…and can easily fit into the categories of the 'mentally ill' or the 'mentally underdeveloped'" (236). In challenging Majnūn's madness, al-Aṣmaʿī and thus the Iṣfahānī of the *Aghānī,* assert their own madness, which implies a madness at work in the text itself. However, what calls the soundness of the speakers' minds into question also calls into question the line between the sound and the unsound mind. The challenge complicates the boundaries of madness itself, and as Steven M. Rosen argues, this sort of paradox "boggles our minds because the human mind is a reflective organ whose principal function is to draw clear-cut boundaries" (18). In repeating the refrain of this paradoxical challenge, the text orients the audience away from this function and toward ambiguity.

Like the initial *khabar*, all but one of the repetitions present the same qualification: that Majnūn was not mad, but he had some "*lawtha*" in him. The structure of exception sets up a relationship between madness and *lawtha*. Having *lawtha*, it implies, can be

mistaken for madness. "*Lawtha*" derives from the root *l-w-th*, meaning to twist or turn around, like the twisting of a turban. As the act of twisting has the potential to both enhance and subvert, to strengthen or weaken, the root takes on both divergent meanings. Dictionary glosses of *lawtha* reflect this polyvalence inherent in the root. In al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī's 18th-century dictionary *Tāj al-ʿArūs*, Ibn Sīda (d. 1066) quotes al-Aṣmaʿī, the final narrator in all but one of the six *akhbār*, as equating "*lawtha*" with both resolution of mind (*ʿazmat al-ʿaql*) and foolishness/stupidity (*ḥumqa*)[46] (1303). Edward Lane's lexicon gives meanings for the term that range from strength, weakness of judgment, weak/incomplete evidence, repetition, stuttering, slowness, stupidity, a touch of madness, and a state of excitement (2678).

The expression of *lawtha* in this challenge—as something one *has* or *possesses*—is the expression we find for the term in the other instances in which it appears in the *Aghānī*. In "Akhbār Maʿn bin ʾAws wa Nasabuhu," the chapter Iṣfahānī devotes to the *mukhaḍram* poet Maʿn bin ʾAws, Saʿīd bin ʿAmr al-Zubayrī relates:

> Maʿn bin ʾAws had a woman called Thūr whom he doted on out of love. She was a village woman who had been raised in al-Shām. Maʿn bin ʾAws had some Bed-

[46] Original text:

وذكر الوجهين ابن سيده في المحكم، عن ابن الأعرابي. اللوثة : الهيج ، بفتح فسكون، ومس الجنون ، وعن الأصمعي: اللوثة: الحمقة، واللوثة: العزمة بالعقل.

ouin Arabness (*aʿrābiyya*) and *lawtha* in him. So, she would laugh at the roughness of his speech/manner (*ʿajrafiyyatihi*).[47] (Iṣfahānī 12: 72-3)

This narrative compares and contrasts *lawtha* with both village cosmopolitanism and Bedouin Arabness and thus directly links the possession of *lawtha* with identity, upbringing, and lineage. Perhaps, then, the best rendering of *lawtha* here would be "something else mixed in." Like his Bedouinness, *lawtha* is what makes Maʿn bin ʾAws walk and talk funny, but what constitutes *lawtha* is unknown and unspoken. It is not an invariable essence, but rather the unfamiliar, foreign, outside thing that mixes with the known, a marker of difference that can charm or repulse.

Another illustrative use of the term *lawtha* in the *Aghānī* comes in the following story from the chapter on the *Jāhilī* poet Zuhayr bin Janāb, "Akhbār Zuhayr bin Janāb wa Nasabuhu":

Zuhayr bin Janāb and his brother Ḥāritha came to some of the kings of Ghassān. When they both entered upon the king, they spoke to him and recited poetry for him. He was delighted by them and drank with them. One day, he said to them: "My mother is very ill, and my treatment for her isn't working. Do you know of a remedy for her?" Ḥāritha said: "Hot *kumayra* (*kumayra ḥārra*)"—he had some *lawtha* in him—so, the king asked: "What was it that you said?" Zuhayr said:

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[47] Original Text:

كان لمعن بن أوس امرأةً يقال لها ثور ومان لها محباً، وكانت حضرية نشأت بالشام، وكانت في معن أعرابية ولوثة ، فكانت تضحك من عجرفيته

> "Hot truffles (*kumayʾa ḥārra*) should be fed to her." The king stood up, and having understood both the former and the latter, showed them that he was ordering a truffle to be prepared for her and dreamt about Ḥāritha's treatise. Ḥāritha said to Zuhayr: "Zuhayr, twist what you want to be twisted." And he delivered it as a lesson (*mathal*).[48] (Iṣfahānī 19: 24)

When Ḥāritha seems to mispronounce the word *kumayʾa* as *kumayra*, the narrator tells us that "he had some *lawtha* in him" (Iṣfahānī 19: 24), suggesting that *lawtha* indicates some speech impediment. One might surmise from this story that the word "*kumayra*" is a nonsense word, and, indeed, it does not appear in the many dictionaries or lexicons I have consulted, nor does it appear in Brigham Young University's Arabic Corpus, outside of its citation of this story from the *Aghānī*. The root *k-m-r*, however, from which *kumayra* would be derived, does give the noun "*kamara*," which refers to "the head of the penis" (*raʾs al-dhakar*) and could resemble a truffle, which is the treatment Zuhayr later suggests and the king "dreamt about" (Ibn Manẓūr 3929). In the context of suggest-

[48] Original text:

وفد زهير بن جناب وأخوه حارثة على بعض ملوك غسان، فلما دخلا عليه حدثاه وأنشداه، فأعجب بهما ونادمهما، فقال يوماً لهما: إن أمي عليلة شديدة العلة، وقد أعياني دواؤها، فهل تعرفان لها دواء؟ فقال حارثة: كميرة حارة وكانت فيه لوثة فقال الملك: أي شيء قلت؟ فقال له زهير: كميئة حارة تطعمها، فوثب الملك وقد فهم الأولى والآخرة يريهما أنه يأمر بإصلاح الكمأة لها، وحلم عن مقالة. وقال حارثة لزهير: يا زهير اقلب ما شئت ينقلب، فأرسلها مثلاً.

ing treatment for a king's mother, the idea of a "hot glans" as a remedy may appear deviant and perverse. Ḥāritha's "lesson" to his brother Zuhayr—"flip what you want to be flipped"—itself flips or twists the situation on its head, suggesting that it was Zuhayr, not Ḥāritha, who twisted something when he corrected his brother by saying "truffle." What causes Ḥāritha to "misspeak"—this *lawtha*—also causes him to twist norms and expectations, which recalls the core meaning of *l-w-th*: to be twisted. Indeed, the *khabar* directly following this story in the chapter tells of Zuhayr losing his mind.

In both the stories from the *Aghānī* cited above, *lawtha* marks difference, difference that manifests in speech. It is intangible precisely because it only asserts itself or arises as a "symptom" in a particular context, that is, in relation to surrounding norms. At the same time, however, *lawtha* embraces that which is normative along with that which is non-normative: which is which when they can be flipped? To be mad, or "*majnūn*," on the other hand, implies a state of *jinn* (spirit) possession independent of time and place. When the Qurʾān rebuts disbelievers calling the Prophet Muḥammad "*majnūn*," it is as an accusation and an attempt to discredit him. The narrators in these stories use *lawtha* not as part of an accusation or attempt at labeling a character but rather an explanation for the events in the story. *Lawtha* is the answer to the questions: Why does Thūr laugh at Maʿn bin ʾAws' speech? Why does his speech seem rough to her? Why does Ḥāritha suggest to the king that he treat his mother's ailment with "hot glans"? As an answer, however, *lawtha* leaves a great deal of ambiguity.

The refrain of "He was not *majnūn*, rather he had some '*lawtha*' in him" in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" foregrounds the question of Majnūn's mad-

ness, while also connecting it with questions of his identity and existence. The chapter implies in its title that he is *majnūn*, evoking the stereotypical expectations of spiritual inspiration and possession. The paradox of "He was not *majnūn*" challenges the audience's assumptions and tendency to look for clear-cut boundaries, while the qualification that "he had some '*lawtha*' in him" refocuses the question of madness toward this notion of *lawtha*, of in-betweenness, of what is and is not normative. In casting madness as socially contingent, this challenge also suggests that Majnūn's "madness" is neither a productive state or a detrimental one, but rather a distinctive and enigmatic potential for both weakness and strength, charm and repulsion. In confronting Majnūn's madness as *lawtha*, the audience is invited to acknowledge its own role in reframing madness and difference and also to question norms and its relationship to them.

SUBSUMED BY MADNESS

The word "*majnūn*" appears approximately 150 times in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu." The polyvalence of the word and the confusion around Majnūn's identity and existence lead us not only to ask to what *majnūn* refers—an adjective (mad), a label (madman), a name (Majnūn)—but also to whom it refers. We can read Ibn al-Aʿrābī's declaration in *khabar* 21 that "Muʿādh bin Kulayb was *majnūn*" (Iṣfahānī 2: 9), for example, as a declaration that this Muʿādh was mad, or that he was a madman, or that he was a "*Majnūn*." If we take it to refer to a "*Majnūn*," which one? Indeed, "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" presents a world full of many Majnūns (*majānīn*)/madmen. In *khabar* 5, for example, we encounter Ibn Daʾab asking a man from the Banū ʿĀmir tribe about Majnūn. In response, the man exclaims, "Have we exhausted

all the poetry of the wise men, to the point that we are reciting the poems of the mad ones! Indeed, they are many!" (Iṣfahānī 2: 4).

"*Majnūn*" is a passive participle from the root *j-n-n*, which not only conveys being or becoming "possessed" or "mad, insane, unsound in mind or intellect," but also evokes veiling, concealing, or hiding (Lane 462). Engaging the latter sense of *j-n-n*, we might read "*majnūn*" as "covered" or "that who is hidden." As the *akhbār* in the introduction to the chapter proceed, Majnūn seems to disappear under the cover of other madmen, other lovers, and other poets. The *akhbār* leading up to the story of Majnūn increasingly raise doubts about his claim to the poetry attributed to him and his existence. The *akhbār* continuously complicate and challenge the notion of "*majnūn*." Then, in *akhbār* 31 and 32, we find that the characters being asked about Majnūn have never heard of him:

> [31] I recited to ʾAyūb bin ʿAbāya these two verses:
>
> My friends, you told me that Taymāʾ is Laylā's home
> Whenever summer has thrown down its anchor
> But these summer months have passed us by
> So to where has the distance flung Laylā?
>
> I asked him about who said them. He said: "Jamīl." So, I told him: "People recite them as Majnūn's." He responded: "Who is Majnūn?" I told him, and he said: "This has no truth to it, and I've not heard about it."[49]

[49] Original text:

[32] I asked Abū Bakar al-ʿAdawī about these two verses. He said: "They are Jamīl's." He didn't know al-Majnūn. So, I said: "Do they both have more than these two verses?" He said: "Yes." Then he recited to me:

I fear I will die suddenly

While my soul still needs you as it does

Each time I meet you, seeing you makes me

Forget to express what's inside me

They said: "He has an illness

But my soul knew where to find the cure"[50] (Iṣfahānī 2: 11)

أخبرني عيسى بن الحسين الوراق قال حدثنا عمر بن شبة قال حدثني إسحاق قال: أنشدت أيوب بن عباية هذين البيتين:

وخبرتماني أن تيماء منزلٌ لليلى إذا ما الصيف ألقى المراسيا

فهذي شهور الصيف عنا قد انقضت فما للنوى ترمي بليلى المراميا

وسألته عن قائلهما، فقال: جميلٌ، فقلت له: إن الناس يروونهما للمجنون، فقال: ومن هو المجنون؟ فأخبرته، فقال: ما لهذا حقيقةٌ ولا سمعت به.

[50] Original text:

وأخبرني عمي عن عبد الله بن شبيب بن هارون بن موسى الفروي قال: سألت أبا بكر العدوي عن هذين البيتين فقال: هما لجميل، ولم يعرف المجنون، فقلت: فهل معهما غيرهما؟ قال: نعم، وأنشدني:

وإني لأخشى أن أموت فجاءةً وفي النفس حاجاتٌ إليك كما هي

وإني لينسيني لقاؤك كلما لقيتك يوماً أن أبثك ما بيا

Majnūn's identity is subsumed under others' identities. These *akhbār* suggest that "Majnūn" had become an archetype among certain "people," a category for amorous verse about Laylā. Rather than distinguishing him, his madness and love of Laylā make Majnūn indistinguishable in a world of mad lovers.

The overwhelming majority of utterances of the word "Majnūn" in the chapter come in the definite form; narrators most often refer to the poet as "the Majnūn." Understood in this way, "the Majnūn" is less a nickname and more an attempt to distinguish one particular Majnūn in a world filled with Majnūns (*majānīn*). That madness was not a particularly unique trait, at least among the members of the Banū ʿĀmir tribe, is echoed in *khabar* 20.[51] In it, al-Aṣmaʿī speaks of a time he asked a man from the Banū ʿĀmir

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وقالوا بـه داءٌ عـياءٌ أصـابـه وقد علمت نفسي مـكـان دوائيا

[51] Original text:

وأخبرني عمر بن عبد الله بن جميلٍ العتكي قال حدثنا عمر بن شبة قال حدثنا الأصمعي قال: سألت أعرابياً من بني عامر بن صعصعة عن المجنون العامري فقال: عن أيهم تسألني؟ فقد كان فينا جماعةٌ رموا بالجنون، فعن أيهم تسأل؟ فقلت: عن الذي كان يشبب بليلى، فقال: كلهم كان يشبب بليلى، قلت: فأنشدني لبعضهم، فأنشدني لمزاحم بن الحارث المجنون:

ألا أيها القلب الذي لج هائمـاً بليلى وليداً لم تقطع تمائمـه

أفق قد أفاق العاشقون وقد أنى لك اليوم أن تلقى طبيباً تلائمه

أجدك لا تنسيك ليلى مـلـمةٌ تلم ولا عهدٌ يطول تقـادمـه

قلت: فأنشدني لغيره منهم، فأنشدني لمعاذ بن كليبٍ المجنون:

tribe about "al-Majnūn al-ʿĀmirī" (the madman of the Banū ʿĀmir tribe) (Iṣfahānī 2: 8). The man replied: "About which one of them do you ask—we've had a group of us who were thrown into madness, so about which one of them do you ask?" (Iṣfahānī 2: 8). Al-Aṣmaʿī explains that he is asking about "the one that would compose love poems about Laylā," to which the man answers: "All of them would compose love poems about Laylā" (Iṣfahānī 2: 8). Upon al-Aṣmaʿī's request, the man recites verse for three such madmen—Muzāḥim, bin Ḥārith, Muʿādh bin Kulayb, and Mahdī bin al-Malawwaḥ (Iṣfahānī 2: 8). When asked to continue to recite verse for the rest of the mad Banū ʿĀmir who rhapsodized about Laylā, the man declines: "That's enough for you! By God, even just one of them is equal to your wise men today" (Iṣfahānī 2: 9). Al-Aṣmaʿī's pursuit of Majnūn reenacts Majnūn's pursuit of Laylā, dramatically reproducing and participating in the story of Majnūn in a way akin to the critical interpretation of *The Turn of the Screw* reproduces the text and "unwittingly *participates in it*," as Felman argues (148). Al-

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ألا طالما لاعبت ليلى وقادني إلى اللهو قلبٌ للحسان تبوع

وطال امتراء الشوق عيني كلما نزفت دموعاً تستجد دموع

فقد طال إمساكي على الكبد التي بها من هوى ليلى الغداة صدوع

قلت: فأنشدني لغير هذين ممن ذكرت، فأنشدني لمهدي بن الملوح:

لو أن لك الدنيا وما عدلت به سواها وليلى بائنٌ عنك بينها

لكنت إلى ليلى فقيراً وإنما يقود إليها ود نفسك حينها

قلت له: فأنشدني لمن بقي من هؤلاء، فقال: حسبك! فوالله إن في واحد من هؤلاء لمن يوزن بعقلائكم اليوم.

Aṣmaʿī's madness, like Majnūn's, is the madness of the pursuit of the unattainable, and as an audience, we are similarly set on a pursuit of Majnūn, continuing the performance of madness in the text and filling up the space of the text with even more madmen.

Whereas the repeated challenges to Majnūn's madness substitute the notion of "*lawtha*" for madness, *khabar* 4 and *khabar* 20, in which Ibn Daʾab and al-Aṣmaʿī, respectively, relate anecdotes about asking the Banū ʿĀmir about al-Majnūn, further challenge Majnūn's status as the archetypal mad poet, as his madness becomes a commonplace madness and his poetry indistinguishable from other madmen. The question is no longer one of whether Majnūn was mad. Rather, these *akhbār* interrogate the notion of madness itself; indeed, what does it mean to be mad among a tribe of madmen? Shoshana Felman poses a similar question in *Writing and Madness*: "Why is everyone today meddling with madness? What does it mean to talk about madness? How can madness thus become commonplace?" (13). While madness "usually occupies a position of *exclusion*," she reasons, "madness that is common place occupies a position of inclusion" in such a way that an entire era would "become subsumed within the space of madness" (Felman, *Writing and Madnes*s 14). Through these *akhbār*, whose arrangement frames them as an exploration of madness, Iṣfahānī invites the audience to confront this scenario, in which the boundary designating what is outside of madness and what is inside of it has disappeared. As a discourse on madness, the "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" is simultaneously exterior to and interior to the madness at hand. But whereas Felman's questions problematize the paradoxical ubiquity of madness in the contemporary world, Iṣfahānī raises the question of a culture subsumed by madness by raising the notion of its

ubiquity as well its relativity: one tribe's madman is another tribe's wise man, as the mysterious Bedouin tells al-Aṣmaʿī.

In and Out of Madness

Thus far, my investigation of madness in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" has focused on the first 32 *akhbār* that constitute the introductory section of the chapter and their arrangement, which raise the questions "What does it mean to be Majnūn?" and "What does it mean to call someone Majnūn?" In the *akhbār* that follow the introduction, Majnūn's story unfolds as an investigation of the nature and cause of his "madness." The short *akhbār* of the introduction grow into longer narratives, in which the term "junūn," the noun related to "Majnūn" and denoting "madness," only appears once outside of poetic verse. With the inclusion of more descriptive and active terms and phrases, the notion of madness expands beyond *junūn*.

These *akhbār* speak of madness with verbs such as "*ikhtalaṭa*" (to be muddled), "*khūliṭa*" (to be mixed), and "*iltabasa*" (to be confused), suggesting that becoming mad is an event, a transformative becoming brought on by confusion. Deriving from the root *kh-l-ṭ*, *ikhtalaṭa* and *khūliṭa* suggest mixing and blending and thus take on connotations of being or becoming confused and muddled. The reflexive verb *ikhtalaṭa* and its related verbal noun *ikhtilāṭ* appear eight times in the main narratives that follow the introductory section, and a variety of narrators employ them. In each instance, Majnūn's confusion is preceded by an adverb of time,—*ḥaynaʾidhin* (at that time), *qablu* (before), *baʿda* (after), and *lammā* (when)—emphasizing the sense of his *becoming* confused and muddled. This moment of transformation indicated by his *ikhtilāṭ* purports to organize time into catego-

ries of before and after. Like Jesus's birth, the hijra, and Creation, the moment at which Majnūn's mind became muddled presents itself as a marker of an episode one that is internal to the story. Although this temporal "dichotomy" initially seems straightforward, as the stories progress, the way in which narrators employ it reveals the marker to be problematic. The following excerpts list the uses of the verb *ikhtalaṭa* and the verbal noun *ikhtilāṭ* in the order in which they appear in the text:

> [1] His father died before his *becoming muddled*.[52] (Iṣfahānī 2: 6)
>
> [2] Laylā promised him before he *became muddled* that she would try to visit him at night if she had the chance.[53] (Iṣfahānī 2: 27)
>
> [3] When the mind of Qays bin al-Malawwaḥ *become muddled* and he abandoned food and drink, his mother went to Laylā.[54] (Iṣfahānī 2: 34)
>
> [4] His father died before his *becoming muddled* and wild.[55] (Iṣfahānī 2: 65)

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[52] Original text:

أباه مات قبل اختلاطه

[53] Original text:

ليلى وعدته قبل أن يختلط أن تستزيره ليلةً إذا وجدت فرصةً لذلك

[54] Original text:

لما اختلط عقل قيس بن الملوح وترك الطعام والشراب، مضت أمه إلى ليلى

[55] Original text:

ومات قبل اختلاطه وتوحشه

[5] Al-Majnūn fell ill before his *becoming muddled*. His *qawm* and their women visited him, but Laylā was not among them.[56] (Iṣfahānī 2: 66)

[6] Al-Majnūn became very sickly before his *becoming muddled* to the point of near-death. His father came to him in order to cure him, and he found him singing these verses and sobbing feverishly:

O heart that clings to Laylā out of a mad kind of love

Like a boy whose amulets were not yet severed

Recover! The other lovers have recovered and the time has come

For you to meet a doctor with whom you agree[57] (Iṣfahānī 2: 72)

[7] I passed by Majnūn while he was looking down upon a valley in the spring-time, and that was before he *became muddled*. He was singing poetry I was not able to understand[58] (Iṣfahānī 2: 85)

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[56] Original text:

مرض المجنون قبل أن يختلط فعاده قومه ونساؤهم ولم تعده ليلى فيمن عاده

[57] Original text:

المجنون سقم سقاما شديداً قبل اختلاطه حتى أشفى على الهلاك، فدخل إليه أبوه يعلله فوجده ينشد هذه الأبيات ويبكي أحر بكاء وينشج أحر نشيج:

ألا أيها القلب الذي لـج هـائمـاًبليلى وليداً لم تقطع تـمـائمـه

أفق قد أفاق العاشقون وقد أنـى لحالك أن تلقى طبيباً تـلائمـه

[58] Original text:

مررت بالمجنون وهو مشرفٌ على وادٍ في أيام الربيع، وذاك قبل أن يختلط، وهو يتغنى بشعر لم أفهمه

> [8] Al-Majnūn passed by Laylā *after his becoming muddled* while she was walking in Ẓāhir al-Buyūt.[59] A long period of separation had passed. When he saw her, he cried until he fell on his face in a swoon. She took off, scared that her family would find her with him.[60] (Iṣfahānī 2: 86)

The first four excerpts seem to present Majnūn's *ikhtilāṭ* (becoming-muddled) as a singular moment in time. In particular, excerpts 1 and 4 relate it temporally to the singular moment of the death of his father, suggesting each as an event fixed in time. The use of his *ikhtilāṭ* as an organizing principle, however, quickly becomes confused. In the pages between these two reports, we find a long *akhbār* in which Majnūn's father recounts Majnūn's story with Laylā and his losing his mind:

> He became hot and fainted and then awoke having lost his mind. He wouldn't wear a robe without tearing it off, he wouldn't walk around without being completely naked, and he would play with dirt and gather bones around himself. Whenever Laylā was mentioned to him, he would start speaking about her rationally, without missing a syllable. He had given up prayer (*ṣalāh*), and when it was said to him: "What's wrong? Why don't you pray?!" He wouldn't utter a syllable. We would lock him up and tie him down, so he bit his tongue and his lip until we

[59] Ẓāhir al-Buyūt is a location in al-Ṣaʿda in Yemen.

[60] Original text:

مر المجنون بعد اختلاطه بليلى "وهي" تمشي في ظاهر البيوت بعد فقدٍ لها طويل، فلما رآها بكى حتى سقط على وجهه مغشياً عليه، فانصرفت خوفاً من أهلها أن يلقوها عنده

became afraid for his safety. So, we let him go on his way, and so he wandered around in love.[61] (Iṣfahānī 2: 17)

The *akhbār* continue to complicate the singularity of his *ikhtilāṭ*, i.e., becoming mad. In excerpts 5 and 6 we learn that Majnūn was sick and on the verge of death before he became muddled. It was also before Majnūn's becoming muddled that the narrator of excerpt 7 reports to have found him singing incomprehensible poetry atop a mountain. These *akhbār* stage performances of symptoms of his madness—illness, wandering, and incomprehensibility—yet the narrators have placed them "before his becoming muddled." What, then, does it mean that he became muddled? In other words, what distinguishes what came before from what came after? Madness and mental muddling are not so easy to differentiate from sanity in Iṣfahānī's retelling of the Majnūn Laylā romance. Majnūn's madness, as Iṣfahānī presents it to us, is itself muddled.

Kilpatrick ("Modernity") and Khan have suggested that Iṣfahānī organizes Majnūn's *akhbār* to create three story cycles, such that each cycle offers different chronologies of events as well as different versions of events. While I am unable to identify three distinct story cycles as they have, their observations reinforce the argument that de-

[61] Original text:

فخر مغشياً عليه ثم أفاق فاقداً عقله، فكان لا يلبس ثوباً إلا خرقه ولا يمشي إلا عارياً ويلعب بالتراب ويجمع العظام حوله، فإذا ذكرت له ليلى أنشأ يحدث عنها عاقلاً ولا يخطىء حرفاً، وترك الصلاة، فإذا قيل له: ما لك لا تصلي! لم يرد حرفاً، وكنا نحبسه ونقيده، فيعض لسانه وشفته، حتى خشينا عليه فخلينا سبيله فهو يهيم.

spite attempts to find one narrative chronology in Iṣfahānī's organization of the "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu," the audience struggles to anchor its experience of the chapter in linear time. Especially with the slipperiness of terms like *ikhtilāṭ*, the audience finds little support upon which to rely and to determine Majnūn's mental state at any given time. The incongruity between descriptive terms of madness and narrated events again produces performative friction foregrounds the question of madness while complicating the notion of it. Far from defining his mental state in dualistic terms (mad/not mad), Iṣfahānī's presentation of the *akhbār* offers a nuanced exploration of Majnūn's mental state that calls attention to moments of transition and stages episodes on a spectrum of counter-normativity.

Not only do the incongruities between *akhbār* call attention to Majnūn's changing mental states, but the *akhbār* Iṣfahānī presents themselves stage madness as changeable. "Madness" is not a fixed state in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu." Narrators dramatize this changeability in the following narrative, the *isnād* of which relates three chains of transmission that come together with the words "they said altogether" (*qālū jamīʿan*) (Iṣfahānī 2: 48):

> When al-Majnūn and Laylā were young, they would care for her family's sheep atop a mountain in their country called al-Tawbād.[62] When his mind left and he became wild (*tawaḥḥasha*), he went to that mountain and dwelled there. When he remembered the days he spent roaming the mountain with Laylā, he let out a in-

[62] Al-Tawbād is a mountain approximately 200 miles southwest of Riyadh.

> tense outburst of grief and became troubled and lonely (*istawḥasha*). Then, he wandered about deliriously until he reached the outskirts of al-Shaʾm[63]. When he recovered his mind, he saw a country he didn't know and said to the people he met there: "Please, where is al-Tawbād of the land of the Banū ʿĀmir?" They replied: "You couldn't be further from the lands of the Banū ʿĀmir! You're in the Levant (*al-shaʾm*). You must follow these stars and he was shown the way." Then, he set out towards those stars until he reached the land of Yemen (*al-yaman*).[64] (Iṣfahānī 2: 48-49)

This anecdote is one of many that stage Majnūn's "madness" as a transitory state. Not only are his mad states of mind temporary, they are of different sorts and exist along a spectrum of counter-normativity. First he becomes dispossessed of his mind (*dhahaba ʿaqluhu*) and wild (*tawaḥḥasha*), next he becomes troubled and lonely (*istawḥasha*) and

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[63] Al-Shaʾm indicates the Levant region and also invites associations with despondency and the verbal noun *al-shaʾm*, which denotes attracting bad luck.

[64] Original text:

كان المجنون وليلى وهما صبيان يرعيان غنماً لأهلها عند جبلٍ في بلادهما يقال له التوباد، فلما ذهب عقله وتوحش، كان يجيء إلى ذلك الجبل فيقيم به، فإذا تذكر أيام كان يطيف هو وليلى به جزع جزعاً شديداً واستوحش فهام على وجهه حتى يأتي نواحي الشأم، فإذا ثاب إليه عقله رأى بلداً لا يعرفه فيقول للناس الذين يلقاهم: بأبي أنتم، أين التوباد من أرض بني عامر؟ فيقال له: وأين أنت من أرض بني عامر! أنت بالشأم عليك بنجم كذا فأمه، فيمضي على وجهه نحو ذلك النجم حتى يقع بأرض اليمن

wanders about like a madman (*hām ʿalā wajhihi*) (Iṣfahānī 1: 48-49). Then, he recovers his mind (*thāb ilayhi ʿaqluhu*) (Iṣfahānī 2: 49). These varied sorts of madness produce their own performative friction that opens up many "truths" about madness.

While the above *khabar* emphasizes the temporality and divergence of his "madness," other *akhbār* call attention to the temporality of his sanity. For example, Abū Naṣr Aḥmad bin Ḥātim (d. 845) tells a story on the authority of an unspecified "group of narrators" in which ʿUmar bin ʿAbd al-Raḥmān bin ʿAwf (d. 652), one of the companions of the prophet Muḥammad, having agreed to attend a gathering with Majnūn, rescinds, which leads Majnūn to despair (*ʾāyisan*) and "return to his original state" (*fa ʿād ʾilā ḥālihi al-ʾūlā*) (Iṣfahānī 2: 17-18). His "original state," as the narrators employ the term here, refers to his "confused" state, as the rest of the *khabar* indicates as it continues to chronicle Majnūn's transitions:

> That remained his condition (*ḥālahu*), even when he was not out in the uninhabited desert (*mustawḥish*). Rather, he would be in the outskirts of the village, withdrawn and naked. He wouldn't wear a robe without tearing it; he was delirious, drawing lines in the ground, playing with dirt and rocks, not responding to anyone asking about anything. When they wanted him to talk or come back to his mind, they would mention Laylā. Then, he would say, "I would give up my father to free her, and my mother!" Then his mind would return to him. They would speak to him and he would respond. The events of the village would come to him and

they would talk to him about them and recite for him love poetry. He would respond positively and recite his own verse to them.[65] (Iṣfahānī 2: 18)

Iṣfahānī stages Majnūn's "original state" as a mindless state of delirium that entails a sense of psychic withdrawal and physical nakedness. This mindless state, it suggests, is his default setting, while sanity, i.e., possession of his mind, comes and goes. Further, this withdrawal and delirium does not require his being out in the uninhabited desert (*mustawḥish*). Often an adjective describing land, *mustawḥish* invokes a sense of desertion, a place filled with animals but "destitute of human beings" (Lane 2929), and the sentence that follows "Rather, he would be on the outskirts of the village" reinforces this sense of *mustawḥish* as his geographical setting. *Mustawḥish* might also imply a psychic state, however, as it can be understood as "become wild (beast)" and "savage, uncivilized" (Hava 847). He is *mustawḥish* (becoming wild) without being *mustawḥish* (out in the uninhabited desert). By raising the point that Majnūn is not geographically *mustawḥish*, Iṣfahānī foregrounds the sense of his being psychically *mustawḥish*, i.e., "becoming wild" or "becoming beast," that it then dramatizes: "he wouldn't wear a robe without tearing it; he was delirious, drawing lines in the ground, playing with dirt and rocks, not

[65] Original text:

فلم تزل تلك حاله، إلا أنه غير مستوحشٍ، إنما يكون في جنبات الحي منفرداً عارياً لا يلبس ثوباً إلا خرقه، ويهذي ويخطط في الأرض ويلعب بالتراب والحجارة، ولا يجيب أحداً سأله عن شيء، فإذا أحبوا أن يتكلم أو يثوب عقله ذكروا له ليلى، فيقول: بأبي هي وأمي، ثم يرجع إليه عقله فيخاطبونه ويجيبهم، ويأتيه أحداث الحي فيحدثونه عنها وينشدونه الشعر الغزل، فيجيبهم جواباً صحيحاً وينشدهم أشعاراً قالها

responding to anyone asking about anything." Majnūn's delirious state, we learn, is not merely his original state when he is out in the open desert with the animals, but remains his "original state" even when in the village.

As this story continues, the narrators explain that two years later, when ʿUmar bin ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Nawfal bin Musāḥiq came to collect alms tax from the tribe, he found Majnūn naked and playing with dirt (Iṣfahānī 2: 18). When Nawfal gave him a robe to wear, someone explained to him that this was the son of the village's chief, who does not wear clothes or do anything more than what he was doing at that moment (Iṣfahānī 2: 18). Nawful failed to engage Majnūn in coherent conversation, so the tribesmen instructed him to mention Laylā, which succeeded in bringing his reason back (Iṣfahānī 2: 18).

This story stages Majnūn's confusion and mindlessness as his default state, while sanity, i.e., possession of his mind, visits now and again. As I have tried to demonstrate through this examination of these two *akhbār*, the narrators of "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" adopt different orientations toward Majnūn's psychic state, such that we could quite easily become confused about what such a phrase as "his original state" refers. He so often moves from one state to another that the audience itself becomes confused with regard to which state he is in and which condition is his "original state."

Further complicating the matter, we find that the *akhbār* do not always present this movement as a process that necessarily reaches completion, as the following anecdote indicates:

> When Qays bin al-Malawwaḥ's mind became muddled and he abandoned food and drink, his mother went to Laylā and said: "Qays's love for you has robbed him of his mind and he has abandoned food and drink. If you were to go to him for a bit, I expect that some of his mind would be returned to him."[66] (Iṣfahānī 2: 34)

In this *khabar*, Qays's mother suggests that a visit from Laylā would return "some of his mind" to him. Not only, then, does he move between states of apparent sanity and madness, but these states are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, while the *akhbār* in this section of the text continue to diverge, these divergences become increasingly nuanced. Either-or questions about madness have disappeared, and the notion of madness becomes increasingly complex.

Renate Jacobi, Stefan Sperl, and Suzanne Stetkevych (*Early Islamic Poetry*) have pointed out that what differentiates *ʿudhrī ghazal* poets from the poets of the tripartite *qaṣīda* is their orientation away from social integration and toward wild abandonment (Jacobi , Sperl , Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes* 89). The latter move away from the loneliness of the beloved's deserted campsite toward civilized society. The poet of the *ʿudhrī* tradition, however, "quite explicitly refuses to move psychologically or poetically beyond his

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[66] Original text:

لما اختلط عقل قيس بن الملوح وترك الطعام والشراب، مضت أمه إلى ليلى فقالت لها: إن قيساً قد ذهب حبك بعقله، وترك الطعام والشراب، فلو جئته وقتاً لرجوت أن يثوب إليه <بعض> عقله

love obsession" (S. Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes* 89). Sperl emphasizes the single-mindedness of the ʿ*udhrī ghazal*, the poets of which, he argues, emphasize "the unchanging presence of a certain state of mind and positively rejecting any reorientation towards a different goal" (67). In isolation, the ʿ*udhrī ghazal* may indeed be monothematic and monologic. However, Iṣfahānī's presentation of Majnūn and performance of his story and poetry inserts itself into the ʿ*udhrī* tradition. Although the *ghazal* remains an integral component, his performance of it mixes it with *akhbār* and stages the poet as both author and character. Just as its becoming "mixed" (*ikhtalāṭ*) makes his mind muddled and confused, the mixing of his poetry and lore muddle and confuse the nature of the *ghazal* as presented in Stetkevych and Sperl's analyses. Iṣfahānī arranges and rearranges Majnūn's poetry amidst lore, subverting this unidirectionality and placing it in dialogue with other voices. In Bakhtinian terms, this arrangement allows the poet's "pure and direct expression of his own intention" to be "mediated" by the diverse languages of the text (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 285). The many-voiced discourse of Iṣfahānī's narrative maximizes the dialogic nature of Majnūn's words. Within the framework of "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu," Majnūn's state of mind is far from unchanging. As the *akhbār* move back and forth through time and warps our notions of before and after, we encounter Majnūn's mind moving back and forth, before and after his becoming transformed.

LAYLĀ: CAUSE OR CURE?

The question of cause and cure hover over these stories of Majnūn's changing mental state—what is it that catalyzes the transformation from one state to the other? The story of Majnūn's return to al-Tawbād focuses on what triggers his various states of mad-

ness—remembering his childhood days with Laylā—and ignores the question of what triggers his return to reason. Meanwhile, the story of Ibn ʿAwf's broken promise does the reverse. Without raising the question of why he becomes mad, the story illustrates the efficacy of mentioning Laylā in triggering the return of his mind. In implicitly proposing different sorts of states as his default, these stories also take different interests with regard to cause and cure.

By alternating between different presumptions of Majnūn's "original state," we learn that it is unknowable and contingent upon narrative constructs. As these mental states seem to overlap in terms of both their madness and naturalness, the cause and cure become one and the same. That which carries Majnūn's mind away is also what returns it to him: thoughts of Laylā.[67] While Iṣfahānī often stages the mentioning of Laylā as a means to bring back Majnūn's mind, he often becomes muddled or mad when he hears or recites poetry about her:

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[67] Majnūn sings of this paradox in his poetry:

Whenever Laylā is mentioned, I become reasonable, and
My mental powers return from a many-sided passion
They say: He is healthy, without a touch of insanity,
Or troubles, except for the lies he invents.
The tears from my eyes bear witness to my passion, and my love of her
Makes my flesh waste away from my ribs and sides (Iṣfahānī 2: 19)

The cause of his becoming wild was that one day he was sitting alone in Ḍariyya when he heard someone calling out to him from the mountain:

Each of us, my brother, love Laylā

In my mouth and yours is the dust of Laylā

She confused your heart and then it doubled

In my heart, which is troubled and afflicted

I shared with you a love for one about whom the days

Reveal nothing to us except avoidance

He let out a deep sigh and fainted. This was the cause of his becoming wild. There was no sign of him until Nawful bin Misāḥiq found him.[68] (Iṣfahānī 2: 60)

A variation on this story claims that when Muzāḥim bin al-Ḥārith al-ʿUqaylī recited these verses to him, he became confused (*iltabasa*) and muddled in his mind (*khūliṭa fī ʿaqlihi*). In a third *khabar*, it is once again a disembodied voice that he heard calling out at night:

[68] Original text:

سبب توحشه أنه كان يوماً بضرية جالساً وحده إذ ناداه منادٍ من الجبل:

كلانا يا أخي يحب ليلى بفي وفيك ومن ليلى التراب

لقد خبلت فؤادك ثم ثنت بقلبي فهو مهموم مصاب

شركتك في هوى من ليس تبدي لنا الأيام منه سوى اجتناب

قال: فتنفس الصعداء وغشي عليه، وكان هذا سبب توحشه فلم ير له أثرٌ حتى وجده نوفل بن مساحقٍ

> Abū ʿAmr al-Shaybānī mentioned that he (Majnūn) heard a voice calling out these verses at night, which was the reason for his madness (*junūn*).[69] (Iṣfahānī 2: 9)

These stories illustrate the transformative power of language, which can both cause and cure one of what is called madness. In his *Canon of Medicine*, Ibn Sīna (d. 1037) dedicates a chapter to love sickness (*ʿishq*) in which he notes this connection between language and changing mental states: "His condition changes from exhilaration and laughter to sadness and weeping when he hears love poetry, especially when he remembers the separation and distance from his beloved" (qtd. in Dols 484). This transformative, performative potential of language and speech, particularly poetry, is a driving force in Iṣfahānī's story of Majnūn Laylā. As we have seen in Chapter 1, having been invited to become mad, the audience, like Majnūn, is especially susceptible to this power.

Majnūn's constant susceptibility to various states of madness emerges from his desire for Laylā. While mentions of her stir his psyche, it is his initial infatuation that opens him up to being wholly affected by language. Iṣfahānī's repetition of al-Aṣmaʿī's claim "he wasn't Majnūn rather he had some *lawtha* in him," serves as a reminder of his potential for both mental strength and weakness. Laylā is not only the cause of the mind going but also its return.

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[69] Original text:

وذكر أبو عمرو الشيباني: أنه سمع في الليل هاتفاً يهتف بهذه الأبيات، فكانت سبب جنونه

Conclusion

Iṣfahānī frames and reframes madness throughout "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu." The *akhbār* stage madness as lost reason, being wild, being muddled, being confused, and possessing *lawtha*. Not only is madness of many sorts, it has no invariable essence and knows no boundaries. As *lawtha*, it is both strength and weakness that challenge orthodoxies and norms. This constant reframing stages madness as ubiquitous and relative. Preconceived ideas about madness and Majnūn's madness, in particular, are swept away with the repeated paradoxical refrain "He was not *majnūn*." As the world of "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu," into which the text draws its audience, becomes consumed and subsumed by madness, it implicates that audience in the madness.

Chapter 3

Problematizing Rationality in Iṣfahānī's Qays Lubnā Narrative

INTRODUCTION

The stories of Qays Lubnā, i.e., Qays bin Dharīḥ, and Majnūn Laylā, i.e., Qays bin al-Malawwaḥ, each speak of overwhelming love. The famed intellectual al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868) speaks of the strong legendary association between these poets and their beloveds in the "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir":

> People have attributed all anonymous poetry about Laylā to the Majnūn. Just as they attributed all the poetry of this sort about Lubnā to Qays bin Dharīḥ.[70] (Iṣfahānī 1:10)

Both Qays and Majnūn are struck by passionate love for particular women—Lubnā and Laylā, respectively—from whom they become separated, driving them to frequent fainting spells and plaintive cries publicly in verse. While such could be said of the other stories from the *ʿudhrī* (tragic love) tradition, the stories of these particular *ʿudhrī* poets overlap in more than just their narrative motifs as told in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. In the

[70] Original text:

وقال الجاحظ: ما ترك الناس شعراً مجهول القائل قيل في ليلى إلا نسبوه إلى المجنون، ولا شعراً هذه سبيله قيل في لبنى إلا نسبوه إلى قيس بن ذريح.

"Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" and the "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir," their stories share plot details, poetic verse, the main character's name (Qays), and distinctive phrasings in *akhbār* (lore). Only Qays and Majnūn among the poets under study here are said to have lost their minds in al-Iṣfahānī's selection of *akhbār*, and in contrast to the chapters dedicated to the other poets, their love-sickness dominates in his retelling.

Despite all the concordance between the stories of Majnūn Laylā and Qays Lubnā, the experience of reading the "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" is starkly different from that of reading the "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir." Iṣfahānī's narration of the Qays Lubnā story is not simply the story of Majnūn Laylā with some variation in its particular details and poetic verse. As I have argued in Chapters 1 and 2, Iṣfahānī foregrounds madness in the Majnūn Laylā chapter, which consists of a "muddled" arrangement of often contradictory *akhbār* that draw the audience into Majnūn's wonderment and madness. The *Aghānī* relates the Qays Lubnā legend, in contrast, as a straightforward, seemingly coherent chronologically-arranged narrative.

Iṣfahānī tells us that he sought to arrange Qays's *akhbār* in precisely this "settled" fashion when he lays out his approach to curating this story immediately after introducing Qays by name and familial relations:

> A group of our elders (*shuyūkh*) related the *khabar* of Qays and Lubnā, his wife, to me in connected and disconnected stories and prose (scattered) and verse (arranged) *akhbār*. I brought them together in order that his story (*ḥadīthuhu*) be settled (*yattasiq*). However, for those *akhbār* that came isolated and yet were diffi-

cult to exclude from the whole arrangement, I mention them separately.[71]

(Iṣfahānī 9: 211)

As he relates, Iṣfahānī composed Qays's story from "connected and disconnected stories" and "prose and verse" to relate a continuous narrative (9: 211). After listing the names of the narrators from whose *akhbār* he drew, he notes that he narrates "each agreed upon *khabar* as an uninterrupted continuous narrative" and attributes "each whose knowledge conflicts" to its narrators (9: 211). Thus, rather than relatively short *akhbār* attributed to one or two original sources, we find narrations related as collected, aggregated stories, introduced by a chorus of narrators speaking in unison—"they said." Indeed, immediately after this articulation of his approach, Iṣfahānī announces a story with the declaration "they all said" (*qālū jamīʿan*). The absence of detailed narrative chains (*isnād*), he tells us, indicates consensus.

While the story of Majnūn Laylā reads as a compound narrative, in that it is composed of many discrete, conflicting, and non-chronological *akhbār*, Iṣfahānī presents the story of Qays Lubnā as a collective narrative,[72] combining various narratives to create

[71] Original text:

خبرنا بخبر قيس ولبنى امرأته جماعةٌ من مشايخنا في قصص متصلة ومنقطة وأخبار منثورة ومنظومةٍ، فألفت ذلك أجمع ليتسق حديثه إلا ما جاء مفرداً وعسر إخراجه عن جملة النظم فذكرته على حدة.

[72] This is also the term Daniel Beaumont uses in his analysis of this chapter: "I should mention that most of the narrative about Qays in *al-Aghānī* is a collective narration. Abū 'l-Faraj tells us that he has combined various accounts" (57-8).

longer ones and producing a coherent plot. Unlike his narration of the "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir," Iṣfahānī downplays disagreements, emphasizes consensus, and imposes a linear structure upon the *akhbār* of the "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi." Why does Iṣfahānī approach the narration of these stories in such starkly different manners? We might respond to this question immediately, recalling that the stylistic differentiation between these stories is fitting with the approach to *adab* (inherited humanistic knowledge) Iṣfahānī announces in the *Aghānī'*s introduction, as discussed in Chapter 1. That is, the variation of style, particularly between stories with similar subject matter, would help to "deliver" us "from the familiar" and "refresh" us "through newness" (Iṣfahānī 1: 5). But why, then, does Iṣfahānī narrate the Qays Lubnā legend in this particular way? That is, why does he specifically stage coherence and causality in the "Dhikr of Qays bin Dharīḥ"? As I demonstrate, the imposed formal coherence of this chapter builds towards and allows for the expectation of resolution and thus the very form of the chapter enacts the expected resolution of the Qays Lubnā romance itself—Lubnā becomes Qays's wife. Iṣfahānī makes certain that we know to expect this resolution when he sets out his approach to the chapter at the outset of the story by introducing Lubnā as Qays's wife: "A group of our *shaykhs* related the *khabar* of Qays and Lubnā, his wife,…" (9: 211) Just as Qays's pursuit will reach definitive resolution, so will ours.

The style of narrative Iṣfahānī employs, i.e., a collective narration, seems to present linear narrative cohesion, and this earns the praise of those scholars that take a positivist approach to the *Aghānī*. In particular, they respond to the questions posed above by once again pointing to issues of "factual" accuracy. Krystyna Skarzynska-Bochenska, for

example, argues in "Qays et Lubnā. Victoire de l'amour sur l'autorité du père et de la tribu." that the Qays Lubnā legend is more original and authentic than the other romances based largely on the story's narrative cohesion in Iṣfahānī's *Aghānī*. That is, she finds the chapter's stylistic cohesion convincing in terms of the story's historical accuracy. Iṣfahānī, however, thwarts the expectations for finality he sets up by presenting three divergent "endings" to the story of Qays and Lubnā. Taking a similar positivist approach, Geert Jan Van Gelder is unsurprisingly dismissive of this divergence. Having found the first two endings "fitting," van Gelder determines the third "alternative ending" to be "wholly inappropriate for the classical romantic tale," suggesting it "may have been made up by someone who did not like unhappy endings, or more probably, someone who liked to mock the traditional tear-jerking model" (382). Iṣfahānī's inclusion of this narrative twist, he seems to suggest, stems from his commitment to accuracy and exhaustiveness in reporting the lore around Qays Lubnā.

This chapter, in contrast responds to these questions by considering the performative impact of Iṣfahānī's staging of coherence and causality in the Qays Lubnā story. I suggest that the mode of knowledge at work in the "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" is not the mad wonder of the "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir;" instead, Iṣfahānī's retelling of the Qays Lubnā legend pursues the knowledge of reason, operating through the related ideals of coherence, common sense, and certainty. I argue that by engaging this mode of knowledge in "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi," Iṣfahānī is able to reframe it with a pre-established yet subversive ending that points to the absurdity that adherence to reason inevitably produces.

COLLECTIVE NARRATION

It would be nearly impossible to summarize the 90-page story of Majnūn Laylā as it appears in the *Aghānī* without eliminating narrative conflict. Even if one were to attempt to narrate the story in multiple, separate chronologies and variations, the task would quickly appear Sisyphean, as the possible permutations for renarrating Iṣfahānī's presentation of the story into discrete chronological narratives seem endless. After entering into the madness of the text through the introductory section, we find no stable signifieds behind signifiers, such as "majnūn," through which we can anchor ourselves and the story. The language of time, like Majnūn himself, loses its reason and becomes confounded, and events do not proceed in a linear fashion. An attempt to bring the rationality of cause and effect recreates the madness of the text itself.

Iṣfahānī's presentation of the Qays Lubnā legend, in stark contrast, easily lends itself to plot summary. He combines narratives to create a collective, cohesive narrative in which events are connected through a sense of logic and the audience's attention is drawn toward the movement of the plot. The uniqueness of Iṣfahānī's narrative treatment of the legend has been noted by many scholars of the *Aghānī*. Daniel Beaumont finds that "of the various accounts of lover/poets in *al-Aghānī*, that of Qays bin Dharīḥ has been singled out for most resembling a coherent fictional romance" (57). Hilary Kilpatrick, whose essay on the Qays Lubnā romance is titled "Akhbār Manẓūma (Arranged Akhbār), The Romance of Qays Lubnā in the *Aġānī*," points out that the *akhbār* in this story are distinctively "arranged along chronological and thematic lines" (*Modernity* 251). Krystyna Skarzynska-Bochenska is also among those who argue that the story of Qays

Lubnā is distinguished in the *Aghānī* from other *ʿudhrī* love stories, pointing specifically to its coherence. She praises "la perfection de sa composition," "son originalité," and the "la force de caractère des deux amants" (133) and contrasts this perfection and originality with what is found in what she determines to be imitations—the stories of Majnūn Laylā and Jamīl Buthayna—that took on a tragic form in concordance "aux préceptes de la loi tribale" (143).

Whereas Iṣfahānī is conspicuously reliant on the use of *isnād* (chain of transmitters) in the "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir," his emphasis on narrative coherence rather than *isnād* in the "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" is equally striking. In her study of the development of a tradition of literary criticism in medieval Arabic-Islamic culture, Wen-chin Ouyang links al-Jāḥiẓ's (d. 868) dispensing with *isnād* in his books discussing poetry, specifically *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* (*The Book of Animals*) and *Kitāb al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* (*The Book of Eloquence and Demonstration*), with his reliance "on reason" and his philosophical leaning as a Muʿtazilī (103). The Muʿtazila school of Islamic theology, which began to decline by the end of the tenth century, is associated with rationalism and its eventual incorporation of Greek and Hellenistic philosophy (Hodgson 66). Ouyang contrasts al-Jāḥiẓ's "rational" approach in his works to his contemporary Ibn Sallām's (d. 846) reliance on *isnād* in his documentation of the Arabic poetic tradition, which, she suggests, reflects his approach as a "religious scholar" (103). In other words, Ouyang suggests that the use of *isnād* can be understood not only as an appeal to authority based on the authorizing practice established in *Ḥadīth* (sayings of or about the Prophet Muhammad) scholarship, but also as an appeal to its underlying ap-

proach to knowledge, i.e., the verification of authority through transmission. The choice to relay knowledge without the use of *isnād*, on the other hand, she implies, points to an interest in approaching knowledge through the ideals of rationality.

As suggested by Ouyang's reference to al-Jāḥiẓ, Iṣfahānī's rhetorical strategy of essentially forgoing the use of *isnād* in the "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" was not necessarily unique during his time. Tarif Khalidi determines that while the use of *isnād* in *Ḥadīth* scholarship became increasingly "more rigorous with time," its use among *adab* scholars waxed and waned (*Masʿudi* 24). Although initially these scholars made no use of the practice, they eventually matched the *Ḥadīth* scholars in their "rigorous application" of it until the late ninth century at which point the "trend towards continuous narrative" asserted itself (Khalidi, *Masʿudi* 24). Iṣfahānī composed the *Aghānī*, then, shortly after the practice of *isnād* had begun to go out of fashion for *adab* writers. This shift, as Khalidi points out, coincided with a preference for continuous narratives that seems to have reflected a growing admiration for "conciseness, simplicity, originality, and clarity" (*Historical* 100).

With both approaches to the presentation of *akhbār* in current practice at the time, Iṣfahānī is able to play with the philosophical associations with each. By engaging in the trend of the continuous narrative in the "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi," he alludes to the movement toward favoring "conciseness, simplicity, originality, and clarity" and the ideals of rational thought. Especially because Iṣfahānī engages in both narrative styles in the *Aghānī*, suggesting he is committed to neither as a superior approach, we might think of the "Dhikr of Qays bin Dharīḥ" as a parody of this growing

literary and philosophical trend. Philosophers of the tenth century, such as al-Farābī (d. 950) and al-ʿAmiri (d. 992), contemporaries of Iṣfahānī, began to look toward synthesizing seemingly contradictory approaches to knowledge, such as those indicated by the two narrative styles represented in the "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" and the "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir" (Ouyang 25). This impulse toward synthesis, Ouyang argues, came out of a strategy of legitimizing philosophers' "disciplines of knowledge" at a time when its legitimacy was being called into question (25). In this atmosphere of debate over legitimacy between disciplines, Iṣfahānī seems to find an opportunity to participate as an outsider in both camps.

It is the chameleon-like ease of the *Aghānī*'s movement from one approach to another that seems to point to its outsider status, and, as an outsider, its engagement in these trends carries a sense of infiltration. Kilpatrick proposes that Iṣfahānī's "books betray little interest in philosophical speculation, rationalist theology and the scientific legacy of Antiquity" (*Great Book* 16), but his distinctive narrative choices in the *Aghānī* suggest not a lack of interest but a performative disinterestedness, which itself seems to betray an ulterior agenda. That is, the "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" engages in the principles of "reason" from a critical distance in order to comment upon them and the *ʿudhrī* tradition.

Having mentioned the relative ease of summarizing the "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi," it seems useful to do so and consider the ways in which the plot develops and resolves. As with the majority of chapters that Iṣfahānī dedicates to personalities in the *Aghānī*, it begins with a short introductory section. In it, Iṣfahānī es-

tablished Qays's name, lineage, familial relations, and his milk-kinship with Prophet Muhammad's grandson al-Ḥusayn bin ʿAlī bin Abī Ṭālib. After briefly articulating his approach to the chapter, introducing Lubnā as Qays's wife, and listing the narrators upon whom he relies, he begins the narration of the story, which might be summarized as follows:

Qays falls in love with Lubnā when they first meet outside her tent, where she brings him water. Some days later, Qays returns to relate to Lubnā his love for her, which she admits she also feels for him. When Qays tells his parents about the situation, however, they insist he must instead marry one of his cousins, so his great wealth would not be shared with a stranger. With the help of his prominent foster brother, Ḥusayn Ibn ʻAli, however, Qays succeeds in marrying Lubnā. Qays's mother is particularly displeased with the marriage, as her son focuses only on his wife and has no time for his mother. Soon after, Qays falls seriously ill. His mother plants worry in his father that their son might die without leaving offspring, as Lubnā had not given birth. They both pressure him to divorce her, and eventually he does. Soon after, his mind is swept away and "something like madness" overcomes him. Regretting his decision to obey his parents, Qays seeks out Lubnā whenever he can, while his parents work to distract him from his love sickness with the company of girls from their tribe. He falls gravely ill again, and neither girls nor doctors succeed in curing him. Eventually, Lubnā remarries, as does Qays, whose new wife's name is also Lubnā.

At this point in the story, we encounter three different versions of how the story of Qays and Lubnā ends. In the first two versions, Qays and Lubnā die while

separated. In the third version, they remarry and die while together. This conspicuous divergence from the cohesive style of narration will be discussed in detail below. Up to this point, however, Iṣfahānī arranges the *akhbār* chronologically and draws the audience in through a plot that proceeds as a series of causes and effects. His arrangement delivers what seems to be rational, logical causality from one event to the next in which conflict arises and resolves around issues common to the human experience—love, filial loyalty, inheritance, jealousy, progeny, and illness.

Ṭaha Ḥusayn stresses the story's proximity to familiar "real life" events in his discussion of the *Aghānī*'s narration. This familiarity, he suggests, makes the story ring true for its audience (204):

> As for this story [of Qays Lubnā],…its author succeeded in good composition and good taste and described masterfully in it things found in true daily life, such that from this story you find in yourself great resonance, and it convinces you to say: "This is right" and "this is good."[73] (204-5)

[73] Original text:

أما هذه القصة التي نحن بإزائها، فقد وفق صاحبها إلى حسن التأليف وحسن الذوق، ووصف فيها أشياء تجدها في الحياة اليومية الواقعة، وأتقن وصفها. حتى إن قصته لتجد في نفسك صدى قويًّا، وتحملك على أن تقول: إن هذا لحق، وإن هذا لجيد.

Ṭaha Ḥusayn emphasizes that the story's mimetic realism and resonance with audiences' life experiences establishes a kind of believability. It is believable because it is so reasonable and "almost free of what reason (*al-ʿaql*) cannot accept" (216). Compared to the other stories of *ʿudhrī* love in the *Aghānī*, he argues, the story of Qays Lubnā is the "least absurd and least exaggerated" (207). Unlike his evaluation of the story of Majnūn, Ḥusayn finds Qays's story specifically lacking in wonder: "all of this is something familiar that people don't deny or wonder (*yuʿjabāuna*) at" (Ḥusayn 206).

Indeed, as we have seen in previous chapters, the "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir," is filled with a sense of wonder, and it is specifically in confronting the unfamiliar that excites this wonder (*ʿajab*) in us. The pursuit of wonder demands a kind of madness, as madness gives rise to and allows for a continuous process of defamiliarization. To be mad is to become mixed up and muddled, and by compelling us to enter into this madness through constant mixing and muddling, the "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir" invites us to perceive Majnūn as unfamiliar and abandon our preconceptions. Out of the chaos of the text emerges an ability to appreciate diverse knowledge and ambiguity. The "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi," on the other hand, emphasizes the familiarity of the story and the consensus of narrators around it. Rather than confronting the unfamiliar, we are persuaded by the text's resonance with our prosaic human experience and preconceptions. The story is convincing precisely because it reaffirms our sense of the world.

COHESION AND RATIONALITY

The "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" has many of the trappings of "reason" (*ʿaql*). Discussions of the term *ʿaql* among medieval linguists and philosophers reflect conceptions of reason anchored in its root *ʿ-q-l*, meaning restraint, particularly that associated with the binding of a camel's legs (Ibn Manẓūr 3047). The grammarian Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 939) suggests that a "reasonable" (*ʿāqil*) man is one "one who has gathered together (*jāmiʿ*) his affair (*amrihi*) and his thinking (*raʾyihi*)," (Ibn Manẓūr 3047) meaning he settled his affairs and opinions (Lane 455). This meaning, al-Anbārī argues, is "taken from the expression '*ʿaqaltu al-baʿīr*' (I "*ʿaql*ed" the camel) [said] when I gather its feet together" in order to prevent it from wandering away (Ibn Manẓūr 3047). The active participle *jāmiʿ*, meaning one who has gathered together, brings to mind Iṣfahānī's articulation of his approach to Qays's *akhbār*, in which he employs the root *j-m-ʿ* twice, as shown in bold below:

> I brought [the connected (*muttaṣilah*) and disconnected (*munqaṭiʿah*) stories and prose (scattered) and verse (arranged) *akhbār*] all together (***ajmaʿ***) in order that his story be well-ordered (*yattasiq*). However, for those *akhbār* that came isolated (*mufradan*) and yet were difficult to exclude from the whole arrangement (*jumlat al-naẓm*), I mention them separately (*ʿalā ḥidah*)…I narrate each agreed upon (*muttafaq fihi*) *khabar* as an uninterrupted continuous narrative (*muttaṣilan*) and

attribute each whose knowledge conflicts (*mukhtalaf*) to its narrators. They all (***jamīʿan***) said…[74] (Iṣfahānī 9: 211)

Iṣfahānī's approach brings the *akhbār* "all together," allowing the narrators to speak in unison "all together." This passage, in which Iṣfahānī stages his method as one of gathering together of *akhbār*, not only emphasizes this "reasonable" technique, it also plays with the semantics of separation (*munqaṭiʿah*, *manthūra*, *mufradan*, *ʿalā ḥidah*, *mukhtalaf*) and joining (*muttaṣilah*, *manẓūmah*, *ajmaʿ*, *jumlat al-naẓm*, *muttafaq fihi*, *muttaṣilan*, *jamīʿan*) alternating between words associated with each. This semantic movement between separation and unity mimics the movement of the plot of the Qays Lubnā story, as Iṣfahānī arranges it, between marriage and divorce, physical union and separation, and conflict and resolution.

The story of Qays Lubnā is distinct from the other stories of the *ʿudhrī* tradition precisely because the two lovers unite (*yajtamiʿāni*). Qays and Lubnā join together both physically and legally in the *Aghānī*, and the idea of union, as represented by the root *j-m-ʿ*, is a distinct motif in the poetry of Qays featured in the text. The following excerpted verses offer a sense of the various ways in which the idea of union is employed by Qays:

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[74] Original text:

أخبرنا بخبر قيس ولبنى امرأته جماعةٌ من مشايخنا في قصص متصلة ومنقطة وأخبار منثورة ومنظومةٍ، فألفت ذلك أجمع ليتسق حديثه إلا ما جاء مفرداً وعسر إخراجه عن جملة النظم فذكرته على حدة…وحكيت كل متفقٍ فيه متصلاً، وكل مختلف في معانيه منسوباً إلى راويه. قالوا جميعاً:…

I have resolved (*ajmaʿtu*) to suffer your absence,

knowing that what is between us endures.[75] (Iṣfahānī 9: 231)

The breeze brings us together (*yajmaʿ*)

and we see the beams of the disappearing sun

Our souls meet at night in our village

and we know that we will sleep at daytime.

The solid earth brings us together (*tajmaʿunā*), and above us

is a sky whose stars we see wandering around.[76] (Iṣfahānī 9: 234) But, on my life, I cried intensely over you

even though all of my illness came altogether (*ajmaʿ*) from you.[77] (Iṣfahānī 9: 235)

My day is spent talking and wishing

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[75] Original text:

لمقيم بيننا فيما العهد على فإني وإن أجمعت عنك تجلداً

[76] Original text:

فإن نسيم الجو يجمع بيننا ونبصر قرن الشمس حين تزول

وأرواحنا بالليل في الحي تلتقي ونعلم أنا بالنهار نقيل

وتجمعنا الأرض القرار وفوقنا سماء نرى فيها النجوم تجول

[77] Original text:

أجمع منك كله دائي كان وإن ولكن لعمري قد بكيتك جاهداً

and it pulls me together (*yajmaʿunī*), but at night I am joined (*jāmiʿ*) by worry.[78] (Iṣfahānī 9: 250)

For what God has sought to unite (*jamaʿahu*) there is no separation, just as there is no union (*jāmiʿ*) for what God has separated.[79] (Iṣfahānī 9: 251)

The notion of joining, as expressed by the root *j-m-ʿ*, takes on various particularities of meaning in these verses. The verbs *ajmaʿtu* in the first excerpt and *yajmaʿunī* in the fourth suggest mental resolve and reason. In the third excerpt, the adverb *ajmaʿ* evokes completeness. In the second and fifth, the root *j-m-ʿ* is employed to denote physical and spiritual union of love, and these images evoke the semantically related term *jimāʿ*, which alludes to sexual intercourse (Ibn Manẓūr 681).

The motif points to the interconnectedness of reason, completeness, union, and love, concepts that were being linked philosophically during the tenth century. The philosopher Yahyā bin ʿAdī (965), who was well-versed in the concept of reason as developed in works of Greek philosophy and contributed to its development, offers a poetic argument for the notion that rationality unites all humanity through love in his *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* (*The Refinement of Morals*):

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[78] Original text:

قضي نهاري بالحديث وبالمنى ويجمعني والهم بالليل جامع

[79] Original text:

وليس لأمرٍ حاول الله جمعه مشتٌ ولا ما فرق الله جامع

It is necessary for he who loves perfection to condition his soul to love all people (*al-nās ajmaʿ*) and to show affection and sympathy for them. People are one tribe, all related to one another. Humanity, the adornment of divine power that is in all of them (*jamīʿihum*) and in each one of them, joins them (*tajmaʿuhum*). That is the rational (*ʿāqilah*) soul. With this soul the human becomes human. It is the noblest of the two parts of the human, which are the soul and the body. The human is in reality the rational soul, which is one essence in all people (*jamīʿ al-nass*). And all people are in reality one thing in the form of many individuals. If their souls are all one, and love is in the soul, then they, all of them, must love one another. This is natural in people, as long as the revengeful, passionate soul does not guide them. For this soul likes its owner to be master over other people, and it leads its owner to haughtiness and wonder (*iʿjāb*) and to take dominion over the oppressed, trivialize the poor, and envy the rich and powerful.[80] (55)

[80] Original text:

ينبغي لمحب الكمال أيضا أن يعود نفسه محبة الناس أجمع، والتودد إليهم والتحنن عليهم، والرأفة والرحمة لهم.فإن الناس قبيل واحد متناسبون، تجمعهم الإنسانية، وحلية القوة الإلهية التي هي في جميعهم وفي كل واحد منهم، وهي النفس العاقلة، وبهذه النفس صار الإنسان إنسانا، وهي أشرف جزئي الإنسان اللذين هما النفس والجسد. فالإنسان بالحقيقة هو النفس العاقلة، وهي جوهر واحد في جميع الناس، والناس كلهم بالحقيقة شئ واحد، وبالأشخاص كثيرون وإذا كانت نفوسهم واحدة، والمودّة إنما تكون بالنفس، فواجب أن يكونوا كلهم متحابين متوادّين، وذلك في الناس

Ibn ʿAdī argues that the rational soul defines and unites humanity, which necessitates mutual love and leads naturally to it except for the interference of the "revengeful, passionate soul" (*al-nafs al-ghaḍabiyyah*), which leads to, among other things, "wonder" (*iʿjāb*). Not only does Ibn ʿAdī link reason with unity and love, he sets it in opposition to wonder. While wonder and passion are interested in difference, reason emphasizes sameness. The collective style of narration in the "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi," along with the theme of union, evoke reason and rationality. The knowledge to be gained in this chapter is not the diverse knowledge of the "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir," but rather the certainty and cohesion of reason.

CORRECTNESS AND CERTAINTY

This straightforward style of the Qays Lubnā narrative is evident from the outset of the chapter, which begins with a short introductory section. As we saw in Chapter 1, the "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir" opens with an immediate halt that distances Iṣfahānī from his narration: "He is—according to what those who scrutinized his lineage and his story—Qays" (2: 1). The narrator, or narrators, who scrutinized his lineage and story is nameless, and such scrutinization is shown to have led only to a tentative consensus that extends no further than his first name—Qays. The first sentence of the "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" is also quickly interrupted:

طبيعة، لو لم تقدهم النفس الغضبية، فإن هذه النفس تحبب لصاحبها الترؤس، فتقود صاحبها إلى الكبر والإعجاب، والتسلط على المستضعف، واستصغار الفقير، وحسد الغني وذي الفضل.

> He is, according to al-Kalbī, al-Qaḥdhamī, and others, Qays bin Dharīḥ bin Sunna bin Ḥudhāqa bin Ṭarif bin ʻUtwāra bin ʿĀmir bin Layth bin Bakr bin ʿAbd Manāh; and he is ʿAlū bin Kināna bin Khuzayma bin Mudrika bin Ilyās bin Muḍar bin Nizār. Abū Shurāʿa al-Qaysī mentioned that he is Qays bin Dharīḥ bin al-Ḥubāb bin Sunna; the rest coincides (*muttafaq*) with the above.[81] (Iṣfahānī 9: 210)

This interruption, however, specifies the names of two narrators while also indicating general agreement about the poet's name and lineage. The only conflict is regarding the inclusion of al-Ḥubāb in his lineage, a detail that suggests precision and consensus. While the opening of the introductory section mimics the opening of that of the "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir," it emphasizes the extent of agreement around Qays's identity. After solidly establishing Qays's name and patrilineage, Iṣfahānī presents a *khabar* establishing his mother's patrilineage: "al-Qaḥdhamī mentioned that his mother is the daughter of Sunna bin al-Dhāhil bin ʿĀmir al-Khuzāʿī, and this is the correct [lineage] (*hādhā huwa al-ṣaḥīḥ*)" (Iṣfahānī 9: 210). Correctness (*al-ṣaḥīḥ)* implies, as Lane puts it, freedom "from everything that would occasion doubt or suspicion" (1651). So, even though he

[81] Original text:

هو، فيما ذكر الكلبي والقحذمي وغيرهما، قيس بن ذريح بن سنة بن حذافة بن طريف بن عتوارة بن عامر بن ليث بن بكر بن عبد مناة وهو علي بن كنانة بن خزيمة بن مدركة بن إلياس بن مضر بن نزار. وذكر أبو شراعة القيسي أنه قيس بن ذريح بن الحباب بن سنة؛ وسائر النسب متفق.

mentions no conflicting *akhbār*, Iṣfahānī emphasizes the lack of doubt around this lineage, which leads into statements about his maternal uncle and milk-kinship through his aforementioned mother with the Prophet Muhammad's grandson al-Ḥusayn bin ʿAlī bin Abī Ṭālib. Despite the absence of conflict or divergence, Iṣfahānī calls our attention to the correctness and certainty of this text.

At times, however, Iṣfahānī will include a note about a divergence in the *akhbār* with regard to the narration of a particular episode. In most of these instances, Iṣfahānī intervenes to give a final judgment on which version is "correct" (*ṣaḥīḥ*). One such instance occurs around a discrepancy about length of time within the initial collective narrative that begins "they all said" (*qālū jamīʿan*):

> [Qays's father] said: "I will not be satisfied unless you divorce her." With that, he swore that no roof of any house would shelter him ever until [Qays] divorced Lubnā. So, he would stand under the hot sun and Qays would come and stand beside him in order to shade him with his robe, himself burning under the blazing sun, until shadows became long. Only then would he leave him. He would go to Lubnā and embrace her and she would embrace him. He would weep, and she weeped with him, saying "Qays, don't obey your father, for you will be destroyed and cause me to be destroyed." He would say: "I would not obey anyone when it comes to you ever." It was said: He remained that way for a year. Khālid bin

> Kulthūm said: Ibn ʿĀʾisha mentioned that he remained like that for forty days and then divorced her. This is not correct (*hādhā laysa bi-ṣaḥīḥ*).[82] (Iṣfahānī 9: 214)

It is notable that what, by default, Iṣfahānī seems to suggest is "correct" is the version for which he does not mention the names of the narrators, opting instead to use the passive construction "it is said" (*yuqāl*) to introduce the claim that Qays held out on divorcing Lubnā under these circumstances for a year. Instead, he mentions the chain of narration for the variation he claims is "not correct." While this fits with Iṣfahānī's promise to attribute only specifically divergent *akhbār* to their specific narrators, especially if we are to interpret "conflicting in its knowledge" (*mukhtalaf fī maʿānīhi*) as "not correct," the use of the passive voice calls into question the credibility of the claim that seems to be presented as correct. Although Kilpatrick makes the assumption that the passive voice refers to "the sources for the composite account of the romance of Qays and Lubnā" presented in the introduction, (*Great Book* 383) this would also be the assumption if Iṣfahānī used the collective active construction "they said" (*qālū*). Although divergence is regular-

[82] Original text:

قال: لا أرضى أو تطلقها، وحلف لا يكنه سقف بيت أبداً حتى يطلق لبنى ،فكان يخرج فيقف في حر الشمس، ويجيء قيسٌ فيقف إلى جانبه فيظله بردائه ويصلى هو بحر الشمس حتى يفيء الفيء فينصرف عنه، ويدخل إلى لبنى فيعانقها وتعانقه ويبكي وتبكي معه وتقول له: يا قيس، لا تطع أباك فتهلك وتهلكني. فيقول: ما كنت لأطيع أحداً فيك أبداً. فيقال: إنه مكث كذلك سنةً وقال. خالد بن كلثوم: ذكر ابن عائشة أنه أقام على ذلك أربعين يوماً ثم طلقها. وهذا ليس بصحيح.

ly resolved in finality in the "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi," final resolution is quietly called into question.

Scholars of the *Aghānī* have pointed out the conspicuousness of the version Iṣfahānī chooses to affirm as the "correct" version here, assuming that the idea that Qays lasted one year standing in the hot sun every day does not make logical sense (Kilpatrick, *Great Book*; Ḥusayn, *Ḥadīth al-Arbiʿāʾ*). Kilpatrick suggests Iṣfahānī's decision to affirm the longer time period points to his occasional interest in "artistic truth," that is, that the exaggerated length of time dramatizes the difficulty of Qays's decision to divorce Lubnā and thus his love for her (*Great Book* 118). Ḥusayn is also convinced that Iṣfahānī's choice is "strange" (201). In Ḥusayn's estimation, Iṣfahānī chooses "to deny the closest version to the truth and the nearest to the familiar" when he intervenes to reject the correctness of the forty day period of "exertion and resistance" before "throwing down his weapon" (210). Ḥusayn throws up his hands in the face of his puzzlement over Iṣfahānī's decision as compiler and arranger of *akhbār*. Kilpatrick, however, reasons that Iṣfahānī felt the need to enhance the story with artistic truth, as if forty days standing in the blazing sun would fail to communicate the drama of Qays's position (*Great Book* 118). One could equally argue the artistic effect of a forty day duration, based on the manifold significance of the period in the Arabo-Islamic tradition, such as the length of time Musa spent on Mount Sinai when he received the ten commandments: "And We made an appointment with Moses for thirty nights and perfected them by the addition of ten; so the term of his Lord was completed as forty nights" (*The Qurʾan*, Al-Aʿrāf 7.142). Indeed,

forty days is a common time period suggesting great trial and difficulty in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Iṣfahānī's artfulness, I suggest, is not in dramatizing Qays's stubbornness and the extent of his resistance nor in adding the symbolic weight of the number forty to his demonstration of will. Both versions would individually convey the nobleness of Qays's conflicted loyalty toward his father and wife. Instead, by mentioning both time periods, Iṣfahānī conveys the realistic value and symbolic weight expressed by "forty days" as well as the physical feat implied by "a year." More importantly, by mentioning both time periods and affirming the less realistic, at least by Kilpatrick and Ḥusayn's estimations, Iṣfahānī disrupts the cohesion of the text and calls attention to the incompatibility of "correctness" and consensus (one year) with common sense (40 days). This subtle disruption foreshadows the much more profound disruption at the end of the chapter.

Just as reason's promise of cohesion and coherence begins to unravel, so does the expectation of plot resolution, as the audience has been tipped off that the story should end in marriage. The reveal of the discrepancy between the proposed periods of time for which Qays was able to resist coincides with the reveal of the dissolution of Qays and Lubnā's marriage, that is, the dissolution of the expected conclusion. The story continues for thirty-five pages, chronicling episodes of Qays's love sickness caused by his separation from his beloved. The presentation of Lubnā as Qays's wife in the introduction is recast as a starting point, and the story proceeds as a tale of tragic love.

THREE ENDINGS

The "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" is "well-ordered" and the story it narrates, as Ṭaha Ḥusayn observes, contains "no strangeness (*gharābah*) or absurdity (*iḥālah*)" but rather is "familiar" (*maʾlūf*) and "not difficult to understand or make sense of" (205). When Iṣfahānī's narration finally reaches its resolution, however, it comes in the form of those *akhbār* that Iṣfahānī tells us "came isolated and yet were difficult to exclude from the whole arrangement," and thus mentioned "separately" (Iṣfahānī 9: 211). After thirty-five pages of near-consensus around cohesive and familiar "every day" stories, the final two pages confront us with three different endings, the last and longest of which has the least consensus and presents a deus ex machina-like, dissonant denouement. It is also this final ending that gives us the pre-established, yet thwarted expectation of resolution in marriage. The style of narrative Iṣfahānī employs, i.e., a collective narration, sets up the expectation that things will be tied up, reasonable, *maʿqūl*, but the three conflicting "endings" subvert these expectations.

To better appreciate the way in which the multiple endings impact the narration, it is necessary to consider how the *Aghānī* presents them. Iṣfahānī begins by announcing that the end branches off, and then he presents each branch:

> They differed with regard to the end of Qays and Lubnā's story. Most narrators mentioned that they died in separation from one another. Among them are those who say: He died before her and that news reached her, so she died out of sorrow. Among them are those who say: Rather she died before him and he died out of sorrow for her. Among those that say that was al-Yūsufī based on what he heard

from ʿAlī bin Ṣāliḥ al-Muṣallīl He said that Abū ʿAmrū al-Madanī told me: Lubnā died, so Qays went out with a group from his people and stopped at her grave and said:

Lubnā died, and her death is my death
Is my grief of any use at all?
I will weep the weeping of one who is broken-hearted
whose life ends due to love for one who is dead[83]

Then he bent over her grave, weeping until he fainted. His relatives carried him home while he was unconscious, and he remained sick, unconscious, and not responding to anyone speaking to him for three [days] until he died and his body was buried beside hers.

Al-Qaḥdhamī, Ibn ʿĀʾisha, and Khālid bin Jamāl mentioned that Ibn Abī ʿAtīq went to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the sons of ʿAlī bin Abī Ṭālib, and ʿAbd Allah bin Jaʿfar, may God be pleased with them, and a group of people from the

[83] Original text:

وقد اختلف في آخر أمر قيس ولبنى؛ فذكر أكثر الرواة أنهما ماتا على افتراقهما، فمنهم من قال: إنه مات قبلها وبلغها ذلك فماتت أسفاً عليه. ومنهم من قال: بل ماتت قبله ومات أسفاً عليها، وممن ذكر ذلك اليوسفي عن علي بن صالح المصلى؛ قال قال لي أبو عمرو المدني: ماتت لبنى، فخرج قيسٌ ومعه جماعةٌ من أهله فوقف على قبرها فقال:

ماتت لبينى فموتها موتي هل تنفعن حسرتي على الفوت
وسوف أبكي بكاء مكتئبٍ قضى حياةً وجداً على ميت

Quraysh tribe. He said to them: "I need something from a man I am afraid will refuse me, and I seek the help of your rank and wealth in this matter." They said: "You have that at your disposal from us." They met on the appointed day and he went with them to Lubnā's husband. When he saw them, he was stupefied when they came to him. They said: "We have come to you, all of us together, because Ibn Abī ʿAtīq wants something." He said: "It is done, whatever it is." Ibn Abī ʿAtīq said: "You will do it, whatever it is, in matters of possessions, money, or family?" He said: "Yes." He said: "Then would you give Lubnā, your wife, to them and to me and divorce her." He said: "I testify to you that she is divorced by three!" The others became embarrassed, apologized and said: "By God, we did not know what he wanted, but if we had known that this was it, we would not have asked it of you." Ibn ʿĀʾisha said: Al-Ḥasan compensated him for that with a hundred thousand dirhams. Ibn Abī ʿAtīq brought her to al-Ḥasan. She stayed with him until her waiting period had passed. Then they asked her father to marry her to Qays. She remained with him until they died. They said: Qays said in praise of Ibn Abī ʿAtīq:[84]

[84] Original text:

ثم أكب على القبر يبكي حتى أغمي عليه؛ فرفعه أهله إلى منزله وهو لا يعقل، فلم يزل عليلاً لا يفيق ولا يجيب مكلماً ثلاثاً حتى مات فدفن إلى جنبها. وذكر القحذمي وابن عائشة وخالد بن جمل أن ابن أبي عتيق صار إلى الحسن والحسين ابني علي بن أبي طالب وعبد الله بن جعفر رضي الله عنهم وجماعةٍ من قريش، فقال لهم: إن لي حاجةً إلى

May the Merciful offer the best reward

for the gift given out of kindness towards a friend

I have tested my brothers, all of them

but found none like Ibn Abī ʿAtīq

He sought to settle my affairs after a split

and an opinion on which I deviated from the path

He extinguished a torment that has been in my heart

whose heat suffocated me.

He said: Ibn Abī ʿAtīq said to him: "My friend, stop this praise, for whoever hears it will think me a pimp." End of story.[85] (Iṣfahānī 9: 251-253)

رجل أخشى أن يردني فيها، وإني أستعين بجاهكم وأموالكم فيها عليه. قالوا: ذلك لك مبتذلٌ منا. فاجتمعوا ليومٍ وعدهم فيه، فمضى بهم إلى زوج لبنى. فلما رآهم أعظم مصيرهم إليه وأكبره. فقالوا: لقد جئناك بأجمعنا في حاجة لابن أبي عتيق. قال: هي مقضية كائنةً ما كانت. قال ابن أبي عتيق: قد قضيتها كائنةً ما كانت من ملك أو مال أو أهل؟ قال نعم. قال: تهب لهم ولي لبنى زوجتك وتطلقها. قال: فإني أشهدكم أنها طالقٌ ثلاثاً. فاستحيا القوم واعتذروا وقالوا: والله ما عرفنا حاجته، ولو علمنا أنها هذه ما سألناك إياها. وقال ابن عائشة: فعوضه الحسن من ذلك مائة ألف درهم وحملها ابن أبي عتيق إليه. فلم تزل عنده حتى انقضت عدتها. فسأل القوم أباها فزوجها قيساً، فلم تزل معه حتى ماتا. قالوا: فقال قيس يمدح ابن أبي عتيق:

[85] Original text:

جزى الرحمن أفضل ما يجازي على الإحسان خيراً من صديق

فقد جربت إخواني جميعاً فما ألفيت كابن أبي عتيق

Iṣfahānī's introduces the first two stories by suggesting a degree of consensus around their deaths in separation. These two "endings" deliver the tragic finale common in the *ʿudhrī* tradition and maintains the solemn and earnest tone that characterizes the rest of the story. Qays and Lubnā are brought together in death in these endings, and the story seems to reach its end with the image of their bodies buried beside one another. This narration of Qays's death brings a satisfying resolution to the story, and as van Gelder points out in a note to his translation of the *Aghānī* chapter, it "would have been a fitting end to the story" (382). Van Gelder goes further, admitting that he finds it "something of a disappointment to see that according to modern scholars Qays lived to the age of sixty or even seventy-five, far too old for the traditional hopeless lover" (382). His strong preference for the tragic ending suggests, as Ṭaha Ḥusayn implies, an insistence that previous "experience" should be a definitive guide:

> There are those who want the ending of Qays bin Dharīḥ to be that of Jamīl and Majnūn, and you will recall that Majnūn was found dead in some valley and that Jamīl died a stranger in Egypt. Love killed both of them, so it must be that love kills Qays bin Dharīḥ just as it killed his two friends and just as it killed ʿArwa bin Ḥizām before him.[86] (215)

سعى في جمع شملي بعد صدعٍ ورأيٍ حدت فيه عن الطـريق

وأطفأ لوعةً كانت بـقـلـبـي أغصتني حرارتهـا بـريقـي

قال: فقال له ابن أبي عتيق: يا حبيبي أمسك عن هذا المديح؛ فما يسمعه أحد إلا ظنني قواداً. مضى الحديث.

[86] Original text:

Because love killed Jamīl, Majnūn, and ʿArwa, Qays must also die out of love. The first two endings, in which Qays follows suit with his friends, represent the logic of the same and the rejection of randomness in human experience.

As mentioned earlier, van Gelder finds this "alternative ending" to be "wholly inappropriate for the classical romantic tale," suggesting it "may have been made up by someone who did not like unhappy endings, or more probably, someone who liked to mock the traditional tear-jerking model" (382). The ending, indeed, reads less like a happy ending than it does a mockery. It not only pokes fun at the "tear-jerking model," but more importantly, it toys with the audience who has likely been moved by the seriousness, familiarity, and tragic tone of Qays's story and poetry. Significantly longer than the first two endings, the third alternative is isolated from the narration of the rest of the story, set apart by an introductory *sanad* and offers a drastically different conclusion to the love affair. The separated lovers reunite in marriage. Rather than solemn and tragic, this end is playful and light-hearted and not simply because it provides the reunion of Qays and Lubnā. It ends with a wink— Ibn Abī ʿAtīq responds to Qays's poetic praise by begging him to put an end to it: "My friend, stop this praise, for whoever hears it will think me a pimp" (Iṣfahānī 9: 253). This final line, delivered not by Qays or Lubnā but instead by Ibn Abī ʿAtīq, trivializes the love story and reads like a punchline. After their remar-

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ذلك أن من الناس من أراد أن تكون آخرة قيس بن ذريح كآخرة جميل والمجنون، وأنت تذكر أن المجنون وجد ميتًا في بعض الأودية، وأن جميلا مات غريبًا في مصر، كلاهما قتله الحب، فيجب أن يقتل الحب قيس بن ذريح، كما قتل صاحبيه، وكما قتل عروة بن حزام من قبله.

riage, Qays replaces Lubnā with Ibn Abī ʿAtīq as the object of his poetry, joyfully singing his praises in verse. Like a shy lover, Ibn Abī ʿAtīq asks that Qays cease exposing him in poetry, and the story itself ceases there, i.e., with Ibn Abī ʿAtīq's demand for an abrupt end. Not only does it analogize the sentiments of *ʿudhrī* love with that of ineffective praise poetry, as Qays's verse proves only to embarrass its object of praise, it also scoffs at the audience's emotional investment in Qays's pain and commitment to *ʿudhrī* love, which is brought to an abrupt end in marriage.

The final alternative ending also breaks with the familiarity that characterized the story up to this point. It entails the involvement of two of the most powerful political figures of the time in their reunion, i.e., al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the sons of the fourth "rightly guided" caliph ʿAlī. Although Qays's foster brother intervened successfully before, he participated knowingly in that intervention. In this episode, he appears again, this time with his brother al-Ḥasan and with the weight of their position and money arranged a divorce and a marriage that seemed impossible. In this scenario, however, Ibn Abī ʿAtīq deceives and embarrasses the two respected men of power, mirroring the audience's own sense of deception and embarrassment. Whereas, as Ṭaha Ḥusayn has pointed out, the events of the rest of the narrative are "familiar" to the audience, which can identify with Qays and his struggle, this ending is not taken from the pages of "every day life" (204). Having been an insider, able to understand and identify with the not unusual issues of ensuring progeny, inheritance anxiety, needy mothers, and stubborn fathers, the audience becomes an outsider that is not privy to such resources of power and deception that could magically bring about the seemingly most unobtainable goal.

The audience's expectation of cohesion is betrayed in this alternative ending, both in terms of form and tone. Although we are tipped off at the top of the story that Lubnā is Qays's wife, we no longer know whether or not to expect their remarriage after the divorce. Despite the twists and turns in the plot, however, the cohesiveness of the plot and its narration set up expectations for a cohesive conclusion. If the goal of a collective narrative is "conciseness, simplicity, originality, and clarity," (Khalidi *Historical* 100) Iṣfahānī's narrative has fallen short. The neatness of the first two endings, which seem to flow naturally from the story and bring the action to a definitive end, makes the inclusion of the third ending seem particularly bewildering. The third ending challenges the notion that one can know anything definitively, as this reasonable, persuasive story can so easily be trivialized and its premise of the seriousness of passionate love is so quickly called into question.

CONCLUSION

Iṣfahānī draws the audience into Qay's struggle through a plot that proceeds linearly and narrative tension that arises from familiar human experiences only to poke fun at their earnest investment in the story. His narration of the Qays Lubnā legend ends up drawing our attention to our vulnerability as an audience in the face of the persuasiveness of "reason" as represented by the collective narrative, which necessarily rejects other narrative possibilities and the complexity of the human experience. The problematic conclusion of the narrative dramatizes how the conceit of cohesion attempts to erase the realities of the process that creates cohesion. Considering the political and social context of tenth-century Kufa and Baghdad, in which the *Aghānī* was composed, concerns about the vio-

lent nature of unification are not surprising. As Joel Kraemer points out in his study of the "cultural revival" during the Buyid Age (945-1055), the "unification of a tremendous territory under the single banner of Islam" (30) meant inter-confessional conflict and fragile loyalties (23). "The cohesion of Muslims did not suffice to outweigh subgroup antagonism," he adds, noting the particularly intense "social, religious, and ideological antagonisms" of the period (Kraemer 23).

The "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" raises the question of what gets marginalized or silenced in the process of unification. In the case of Qays, it is the "happy" ending that is left on the margin. Ibn ʿAdī's argument that reason unites mankind in love is thwarted in this chapter, as it is the break with cohesion that brings about union in love. Furthermore, the ideal of human unity achieved through rationality that he articulates is exposed as requiring the reduction of multiplicity and silencing unconventional possibilities. Whereas the "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir" encourages its audience to doubt its certitude by inviting it into the madness of passion and wonder, the "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" does so by exposing the seductive realism of familiarity.

PART II: THE SOCIAL PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Chapter 4

Uprooting the "Authenticity" of Dhū 'l-Rumma in the *Aghānī*

INTRODUCTION

We learn from the Arabic linguist Abū ʿAmr bin al-ʿAlāʾ (d. 776) that "poetry was sealed (*khutima*) with Dhū 'l-Rumma"[87] rather early on in the lore that Iṣfahānī curates in the chapter he devotes to the *ʿudhrī* poet Dhū 'l-Rumma (d. 735), the lover of Mayy, which is titled "Narrations and Lore of Dhu l'Rumma" ("Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu") (Iṣfahānī 18: 14). We might take this as a declaration that Dhū 'l-Rumma was the last poet of the "*Jāhilī* (i.e., pre-Islamic) manner," whose death "marked the end of an era," as Geert Jan van Gelder suggests, or perhaps that he was simply "the last poet," as Arie Schippers takes it (van Gelder 111; Schippers 191, 193). Abū ʿAmr's remark suggests the greatness and inimitability of Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetic contribution. Poetry, it seems, reached its pinnacle with Dhū 'l-Rumma. Or, perhaps, it was specifically *Jāhilī* poetry, as Van Gelder implies.

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[87] Original text:

ختم الشعر بذي الرمة

Iṣfahānī, however, soon confronts us with another remark from Abū ʿAmr. Namely, that "Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry is a bride's beauty marks (*nuqaṭ ʿarūs*) that fade after a short time (*ʿan qalīl*) and animal droppings (*abʿār*) that give a delightful odor (*lahā mashamm*) at first and then return to the smell of dung (*arwāḥ al-baʿr*)" (18: 14, 15).[88] These analogies comparing Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry to beauty marks and animal dung suggest that his poetry invites both delight and disappointment. While his poetry appears admirable at first, Abū ʿAmr seems to suggest, with time, it soon reveals a less attractive side. Iṣfahānī confronts us with both seemingly glowing praise for Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry from Abū ʿAmr, i.e., "poetry was sealed with Dhū 'l-Rumma," as well as a rather biting critique from him, i.e., that Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry is comparable to animal dung.

Iṣfahānī continues to dramatize such divergence of opinion among Dhū 'l-Rumma's contemporaries and close successors over his contribution to and impact on Arabic poetry throughout this chapter of the *Aghānī*. In dramatizing this divergence, Iṣfahānī offers no resolution. The following excerpts from "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu" convey a sense of this unresolved ambivalence and divergence in the reception of his poetry:

> [1] Al-Kumayt said when he heard a verse of Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry: "By God, this is inspired! How great is Bedouin knowledge of the intricacies of reason and

[88] Original text:

إنما شعر ذي الرمة نقط عروس يضمحل عن قليل وأبعار لها مشم في أول شمة ثم تعود إلى أرواح البعر.

the treasures attributed to the mind of those of sound judgment. Better and better"[89] (18: 11-12)

[2] Ḥamād al-Rāwiya said: Dhū 'l-Rumma came to us in Kufa. I had never seen [anyone] more eloquent, or knowledgeable of obscure terms than him."[90] (18: 13)

[3] Ḥamād al-Rāwiya said: "The best of the *Jāhiliyya* at simile (*tashbīh*) is Imrūʾ al-Qays, and Dhū 'l-Rumma is the best of people of Islam at *tashbīh*"[91] (18: 14).

[4] Abū ʿUbayda told me that he heard from Abū ʿAmr: Poetry (*al-shiʿr*) was sealed with Dhū 'l-Rumma and impromptu poetry (*al-rajaz*) was sealed with Ruʾba.[92] (18: 14)

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[89] Original text:

قال الكميت حين سمع قول ذي الرمة...هذا والله ملهم وما علم بدوي بدقائق الفطنة وذخائر كنز العقل المعد لذوي الألباب! أحسن ثم أحسن.

[90] Original text:

قال حماد الراوية: قدم علينا ذو الرمة الكوفة فلم أر أفصح ولا أعلم بغريب منه.

[91] Original text:

حماد الراوية قال: أحسن الجاهلية تشبيهاً امرؤ القيس وذو الرمة أحسن أهل الإسلام تشبيهاً.

[92] Original text:

حدثني أبو عبيدة عن أبي عمرو قال: ختم الشعر بذي الرمة وختم الرجز برؤبة.

[5] Abū ʿAmr bin al-ʿAlāʾ would say: "Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry is a bride's beauty marks that fade after a short time and animal droppings that give a delightful odor at first and then return to the smell of dung"[93] (18: 19)

[6] Al-Farazdaq came upon Dhū 'l-Rumma while he was reciting his poem in which he says:

"When the whip's lashes scattered and the bodies of the mounts bent

like crescents, Saydaḥ[94] made them suffer"

Dhū 'l-Rumma said: "What do you think [of my verse] Abū Firās[95]." He said: "I think well of it." He said: "So, why do you not consider me among the great stud poets (*fuḥūl al-shuʿarāʾ*)?" He said: "What deprives you of that distinction and separates you is your mention of animal dung and your weeping over abodes."[96] (18: 20)

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[93] Original text:

كان أبو عمرو بن العلاء يقول: إنما شعر ذي الرمة نقط عروس يضمحل عن قليل وأبعار لها مشم في أول شمة ثم تعود إلى أرواح البعر.

[94] Saydah, which denotes a donkey's holler, is the name of Dhū 'l-Rumma's camel.

[95] Abū Firās is the nickname for the poet al-Farazdaq (d. 732).

[96] Original text:

قال أبو زيد بن شبة: قال أبو عبيدة:

إذا ارفض أطراف السياط وهللت جروم المطايا عذبتهن صيدح

[7] It was recorded about Dhū ‘l-Rumma that he did not excel at satire or praise poetry.[97] (18: 35)

The critical reactions presented above respond to Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s use of esoteric vocabulary, demonstrations of Bedouin knowledge, talent for *tashbīh*, and deployment of archaic references to animal droppings and abandoned abodes, all features associated with *Jāhilī* poetry.[98] Writing in such a archaicizing *Jāhilī* manner earns Dhū ‘l-Rumma both praise and criticism from his contemporaries and successors in the *Aghānī*. These voices do not diverge based on whether or not Dhū ‘l-Rumma performed this sort of poetry well, but on whether his mastery of them deserves praise. Al-Farazdaq (d. 732), for example, criticizes Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s poetry for his use of images common to Arabic poetry, namely animal droppings and weeping at abandoned campsites, which are motifs that are particularly indicative of the *nasīb*, the elegiac opening to the *qaṣīda* in which the poet reflects on the passage of time and the cruelty of fate (*dahr*). While weeping over abodes and mentioning “animal dung” is reason for lauding Imrūʾ al-Qays (d. 526),[99] the finest

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فقال ذو الرمة: كيف تسمع يا أبا فراس قال: أسمع حسناً قال: فما لي لا أعد في الفحول من الشعراء قال: يمنعك من ذلك ويباعدك ذكرك الأبعار وبكاؤك الديار.

[97] Original text:

إنما وضع من ذي الرمة أنه كان لا يحسن أن يهجو ولا يمدح.

[98] I discuss these features of *Jāhilī* poetry in more detail later.

[99] The first three lines of Imruʾ al-Qays’s “Muʿallaqa, ” which, as Stetkevych points out,

poet in simile-crafting of the *Jāhiliyya*, it is also reason for dismissing Dhū ‘l-Rumma, the finest poet in simile-crafting of the people of Islam, from the highest ranks of poets. Notably, Iṣfahānī’s chapter devoted to the *akhbār* of Imrū’ al-Qays neither mentions nor raises the question of his status as one of the greats, while Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s status is a central theme of his *akhbār*. Why does Iṣfahānī stage Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s poetic merit as still so unsettled two centuries after the poet's death?

Contemporary receptions of Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s poetry continue to enact the unsettledness of his poetic merit and the divergent reception of his poetry that Iṣfahānī drama-

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is “widely considered to be the finest in the Arabic language, composed by that tradition’s most renowned poet” (*Mute Immortals* 241) famously speak of weeping over abodes and the dung of wild animals:

Stop! Let us weep over the memory of a beloved and her abode
Here in the desert between al-Dakhūl and Ḥawmal
And Tuwḍiḥ and al-Miqrāh, its traces have not yet been erased
In spite of the winds weaving across it from the south and north
You see the dung of white antelopes in its desolate spaces
And in its sunken places like peppercorns.

Original text:

قِفَا نَبْكِ مِنْ ذِكْرَى حَبِيبٍ ومَنْزِلِ بِسِقْطِ اللِّوَى بَيْنَ الدَّخُولِ فَحَوْمَلِ
فَتُوْضِحَ فَالمِقْراةِ لَمْ يَعْفُ رَسْمُها لِمَا نَسَجَتْهَا مِنْ جَنُوبٍ وشَمْأَلِ
تَرَى بَعَرَ الأرْآمِ فِي عَرَصَاتِهَا وَقِيْعَانِهَا كَأَنَّهُ حَبُّ فُلْفُلِ

tizes in "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu." For example, the poet's diction has led a number of contemporary scholars, including Jaroslav Stetkevych, Arie Schippers, and Geert Jan van Gelder, to deem it—or his poetry in general—archaic or archaizing (Stetkevych, *Zephyrs of Nejd* 63; Schippers 191,193; van Gelder 110). While van Gelder finds that the difficulty of the language in Dhū 'l-Rumma's work detracts from its value, declaring the poet's "archaic diction and abstruse vocabulary" "hurdles" that the listener or reader must overcome in order to "appreciate his virtues" (110),[100] Stetkevych and Schippers find it invigorating. Specifically, Stetkevych views Dhū 'l-Rumma as a "purposefully archaic poet," (63) whose "precision of...language...adds a special liveliness and earthbound reality to the poet's vision of the firmament" (153). Schippers suggests that the poet's penchant for quadriliteral nouns and adjectives lends an archaic quality to his language, (193) and declares what he finds to be a particularly difficult *qaṣīda* ("*Mā Bālu 'Aynuka*") no less than a "masterpiece" (203)."

Modern scholars' reception of Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry indicated in the brief review above continues and reenacts the divergence of opinion we find in "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu," a text these scholars have closely examined. Despite this performative effect "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu" has seemed to have had on cur-

[100] It is also worth nothing that this response, although more muted, is in keeping with the received orientalist view toward Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry. Reynold Nicholson, for example, saw his work as imitations of "the odes of the desert Arabs with tiresome and ridiculous fidelity" (264).

rent scholars of classical Arabic literature, scholars of the *Aghānī* have given little attention to the divergence and ambivalence we find in this chapter. Instead, the usual relegation of the *Aghānī* to the reference shelf has foreclosed such questions as "why all this divergence and ambivalence?" for most scholars. Instead, scholars refer to "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu" as a source of his poetry and its socio-historical context. Such an approach offers little in the way of opening up this divergence and performative friction as a kind of verbal art for analysis. In redressing this, I engage Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of the rhizome and the ways in which it interacts with the audience and the world through processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization in order to direct a reading of "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu" in relation to the anxieties of 8th and 10th century Arabo-Islamic society.

Because the book, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, might be understood as an "assemblage" connected to other "assemblages," the question of what a book means is irrelevant. The right questions, including those about literature, explore how matter, or literature, functions and with what it functions (Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus* 4). Conceived as a machine, one doesn't ask what a book means, they assert, but rather what it can do and how it relates to other machines:

> Contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an aparallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus* 11)

Rather than approaching the *Aghānī*, then, as an image of Umayyad or Abbasid society, we might consider instead how the manipulation of Dhū ʻl-Rumma lore in the *Aghānī*, as a rhizomatic book, plugs into Umayyad culture and the lore to form a rhizome with them and deterritorialize them. This manipulation also sets itself up to be plugged into the Abbasid social practices of Iṣfahānī's time, which are deterritorialized by the same process and reterritorialized with the meaning reflected back onto it through the audience's participation.

In responding to the guiding question of why Iṣfahānī stages Dhū ʻl-Rumma's poetic merit as so unsettled, I consider Iṣfahānī's selection and arrangement of *akhbār*, in which he weaves *akhbār* about the value of Dhū ʻl-Rumma's poetry into unresolving *akhbār* about his Bedouinness. In this chapter, Iṣfahānī presents us with *akhbār* that reinforce Dhū ʻl-Rumma's Bedouin "authenticity," complicate it, and challenge it. By foregrounding Dhū ʻl-Rumma's multi-faceted liminality throughout the chapter on Dhū ʻl-Rumma, Iṣfahānī breaks down the Bedouin-Urbanite, *Jāhilī*-Islamic dichotomies. As I argue in this chapter, rather than constructing a fixed identity for Dhū ʻl-Rumma, "Dhikr Dhī ʻl-Rumma wa Khabaruhu" presents a poet who moves between identities. With his arcane language and esoteric knowledge, Dhū ʻl-Rumma seems like a time-traveller sent from the *Jāhiliyya* to embody and uphold a culture, through its language and poetry. Furthermore, it is from this culture that this new Islamic society draws its cultural weight, thus creating interest in keeping Dhū ʻl-Rumma rooted and fixed, i.e., "authentic" (*aṣīl*). I argue that in his performance of Dhū ʻl-Rumma's lore in "Dhikr Dhī ʻl-Rumma wa Khabaruhu," which points to this concern about the poet's "rootedness" in Bedouin culture,

i.e., "authenticity" (*aṣāla)*, Iṣfahānī invites his audience to consider the irrelevance and absurdity of looking for "authenticity" in poetry and lore and points to the misguidedness of the interest in fixing them.

A PRE-ISLAMIC POET IN ISLAMIC SOCIETY

Dhū 'l-Rumma composed his poetry at a time of Islamic expansion that involved the establishment of garrison towns, such as Basra and Kufa, where a center "for the expression of old Bedouin ideals" thrived (Hodgson 229). As Marshall Hodgson explains, Arabic poetry was "vigorously transplanted to the new setting" and continued to find its expression in the "standard Bedouin tongue" (229-330). Amidst this movement toward urbanization and toward the idealization of Bedouin, i.e., Arabic, culture, Dhū 'l-Rumma celebrated desert life in his poetry through extended animal descriptions and distinctive vocabulary. The bulk of his poetry is dedicated to "desert themes and motifs" into which he weaves his amatory verse for his beloved Mayya (and sometimes Kharqāʾ). (Sells 67-76). His seemingly encyclopedic knowledge of the desert landscape and fauna makes for varied and novel similes and metaphors.[101] His skill in creating similes became his trademark, earning him praise in the *Aghānī* as "the best of the people of Islam at *tashbīh* (simile)" from the scholar of Arabic poetry Ḥammād al-Rāwiya (d. 771) among others (Iṣfahānī 18: 14). Dhū 'l-Rumma himself is presented in the *Aghānī* as identifying this

[101] See Schippers for an insightful analysis of Dhū 'l-Rumma's metaphorical use of desert animals in his poetry.

strength as a defining trait: "If I say 'as if it were' and then can't find a way out, then may God gag me"[102] (Iṣfahānī 18: 14).

Further situating his poetry in an imagined lost Bedouin past, a deftly employed arcane Arabic lexicon—characteristic of the *Jāhiliyya* period or not—distinguishes his poetry. Much is made of his distinctive word choice in the *Aghānī*, and Iṣfahānī makes it clear that it did not go unnoticed by his contemporaries. Ḥammād al-Rāwiya, for example, recalls the impression Dhū 'l-Rumma made on the people of Kufa during one of his visits: "we had never seen anyone better at, more eloquent in, or knowledgeable of obscure terms (bi-gharībin) than him" (Iṣfahānī 18: 38). Ibn Ḥabīb suggests that the poet earned his *laqab* "Dhū 'l-Rumma." i.e., "the one with the *rumma* (frayed rope)," for his use of the word "*rumma*" in a particular verse (Iṣfahānī 18: 5),[103] which suggests the distinctiveness of the word at the time. In addition to the people of Kufa, others express similar admiration for Dhū 'l-Rumma's performed knowledge. For example, upon hearing some of Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry, the poet al-Kumayt (d. 743) exclaims: "By God, this is inspired. How great is Bedouin knowledge in the intricacies of reason and the treasures stored in the mind of those of sound judgment. Better and better" (Iṣfahānī 18: 12). Al-

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[102] Original text:

سمعت ذا الرمة يقول: إذا قلت: كأنه ثم لم أجد مخرجاً فقطع الله لساني.

[103] Original text:

وقال ابن حبيب: لقب ذا الرمة لقوله: أشعث باقي رمة التقليد

Kumayt's praise for Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry links his poetry to an esoteric Bedouin knowledge that was the under threat of becoming archaic.

Dhū 'l-Rumma composed his verses after Islamic culture had begun to form and spread, which led authors of classical Arabic texts on poets and poetry, such as Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī (d. 846) in his *Ṭabaqāt Fuḥūl al-Shuʿarāʾ* (*Classes of Champion Poets*) to categorize Dhū 'l-Rumma as an Islamic poet. Despite this and although narrators stage him as a pious Muslim,[104] Iṣfahānī's presentation of the *akhbār* dramatizes how cultural imagination links his poetry's rich Arabic vocabulary and vivid desert scenes to esoteric Bedouin knowledge and to the *Jāhiliyya*.[105] But such a poetic identity could only be actu-

[104] A few *akhbar* in "Dhikr and Khabar of Dhū 'l-Rumma" stage the poet as pious. Among them is a khabar from Isā ibn ʾUmar in which Dhū 'l-Rumma says, after finishing the recitation of some poetry: "By God I strike you from behind with something you won't see coming: Praise to God and thanks be to God and there is no god but God. God is great" (Iṣfahānī 18: 52). The *khabar* that follows, from Abū Maʿāwiya al-Ghulabi, specifically remarks on Dhū 'l-Rumma's piousness:

> Dhū 'l-Rumma was good at prayer, good at humility. It was said to him: "How great is your praying!" So he said: "The servant, when he stands between the hands of God, he must be humble." (Iṣfahānī 18: 52)

[105] While other medieval books of poets and poetry tend to organize chapters according to the poet's period and rank, Iṣfahāni does not fix poets and the poetry into definitive categories for interpretation in the *Aghānī*. As its name suggests the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (*The*

alized in relation to variations that proved fitting for the new urban and Islamic setting. The sense that there is a *Jāhilī* manner of composing verse emerges indirectly in the process of those contemporary scholars and fellow poets discussing and musing about Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry in the *Aghānī*. The criticism they level at him inverts the aesthetic model they use for judging those poets who fall into the *Jāhiliyya*, which highlights the anxiety over the future of poetry. Iṣfahānī dramatizes the anxiety that shifting and absent categories inspired and manifests this anxiety as collective ambivalence toward his poetry and through polyvalent judgments that many of his contemporaries express.

Book of Songs) is, on an overt level, a collection of songs. Rather than organizing chapters of his *akhbār* text according to the period or rank of the singers and poets (Iṣfahānī 1: 3-5), Iṣfahānī arranges the material in his *Aghānī* according to three lists of songs he inherited or compiled himself. First, Iṣfahānī presents the one hundred songs selected by musicians of the court of Hārūn al-Rashīd at the end of the 8th century. The second group of songs consists of those composed by the Umayyad and Abbasid families. In the third and final section, he presents songs of his own choosing. Iṣfahānī then follows each song with *akhbār* relating to the poet, singer, or event with whom or which the song is associated, and these groups of *akhbār*, which I refer to as chapters, vary in length in current printed editions from anywhere between four and over a hundred pages. Because lists of songs dictate the overall organization of the text, chapters with similar themes, characters, historical context are scattered throughout the massive book.

The praise of his simile-crafting mentioned above, taken in its larger context, is in keeping with the practice at the time of grouping poets by period: "the best of the *Jāhiliyya* at *tashbīh* is Imrūʾ al-Qays, and Dhū 'l-Rumma is the best of people of Islam at *tashbīh*" (Iṣfahānī 18: 9). While narrators suggest a superficial distinction between Islamic poets and *Jāhilī* poets, nothing in the discussion of Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry in the *Aghānī* points to a preformed notion of a distinction in style. Rather, a sense of a stylistic distinction emerges from Iṣfahānī's performance of the discussions and evaluations of the quality and function of Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry contribution. His performance calls attention to the need for multiple aesthetic models for Arabic poetry. Emerging notions of a *Jāhilī* manner and an Islamic or Classical style of poetic composition can be gleaned in part from the consensus around Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry that builds in his *akhbār* of the *Aghānī*. The first time Dhū 'l-Rumma is praised in the *Aghānī* as "the best of people of Islam at *tashbīh*," Iṣfahānī presents it as the words of Ḥammād al-Rāwiya (Iṣfahānī 18: 14). When Iṣfahānī repeats this *khabar*, the narrator attributes it to an anonymous group, namely "our scholars" (Iṣfahānī 18: 15) Similarly, in Ḥammād al-Rāwiya's first account of Dhū 'l-Rumma's visit to al-Kūfa, he speaks in the first person singular, saying "I had never seen anyone better…" (Iṣfahānī 18: 14). When Iṣfahānī repeats this praise many pages later, however, Iṣfahānī presents Ḥammād al-Rāwiya speaking from the first person plural: "we had never seen anyone better…" (Iṣfahānī 18: 38). These movements from the individual voice to the collective do not point to a growing consensus around the aesthetic or social value of his poetry as a whole, but rather around those aspects of his poetry that make such a consensus difficult to reach, i.e., his use of obscure language and

skill with simile and metaphor. That is, it is specifically because Dhū ʻl-Rumma so masterfully captures desert life to meditate on human experiences through *tashbīh* and deftly employs arcane Arabic lexicon that his verse problematizes Arabic poetry during the transitional period of the mid-eighth century.

Skills in invective and panegyric, however, trumped Dhū ʻl-Rumma's skill set due to the new demands of reconfigured social, political, and economic structures. The growing bureaucracy and emergence of local rulers during the Umayyad period provided "plentiful sources of patronage...to reward poets who would compose occasional poems" (Allen 68). Dhū ʻl-Rumma's achievements in *tashbīh* and agility with the language of poetry contrasted with and emphasized his lack of demonstrated skills in praising and satirizing, social and political weapons that were key in competing for financial support through the expanding patronage system. His lack in this arena, within which most poets made their living, is not merely alluded to in the *Aghānī* by the emphasis on his talent for *tashbīh*. Iṣfahānī includes a number of *akhbār* illustrating his failures in attempting these genres, and the scholar al-Aṣmaʿī relates a *khabar* that declares outright that Dhū ʻl-Rumma "did not excel at satire (*yahjū*) or praise poetry (*yamdaḥ*)" (Iṣfahānī 18: 35).

In his selection and arrangement of *akhbār*, Iṣfahānī stages a consensus around Dhū ʻl-Rumma's failing in praise poetry (*madḥ*), which forms not on the basis of the quality of his panegyric verse itself, which many suggest deserves admiration not derision, but rather on the basis of the verse's failure to achieve its aim (*gharaḍ*)—*madḥ*. Iṣfahānī presents *akhbār* that narrate anecdotes in which the objects of his attempts at

panegyric often received them in unintended ways. In praising the governor of Basra, Bilāl bin Abī Burda, for example, Dhū ‘l-Rumma said:

I saw people seeking pasture where rain has fallen

So I said to Ṣaydaḥ: Seek out Bilāl[106] (Iṣfahānī 18: 35)

In this verse, Dhū ‘l-Rumma plays with the polyvalence of the word Bilāl, which refers to the proper name of the object of praise while also bringing to mind its common interpretation—a place where rain has fallen. It is upon this wordplay that Dhū ‘l-Rumma sets up an analogy between the governor and a place of abundance and generosity, as he directs his camel, Ṣaydaḥ, toward him. Although Dhū ‘l-Rumma relies on his skills in *tashbīh* in composing his verse, he falls short of flattering Bilāl, who embarrasses the poet by pointing out the meagerness of his praise: “Is it only Ṣaydaḥ that seeks me out?!” (Iṣfahānī 18: 35).[107] The negative judgments regarding his panegyric focus not on its aesthetic function but its social and political function. It is Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s praise poetry that he and others consider his most inspired work. In considering the way in which he composed certain verses, Dhū ‘l-Rumma reports that it is a verse intended as *madḥ* that caused him great madness:

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[106] Original text:

رأيت الناس ينتجعون غيثاً فقلت لصيدح: انتجعي بلالا

[107] Original text:

قال له : أو لم ينتجعني غير صيدح ؟ يا غلام , أعطه حبل قتَّ لصيدح فأخجله

In my poetry is that which comes easy to me and helps me along in the process. There is also that for which I must strain myself. There is as well that for which I become completely possessed with madness. As for that which comes easy to me:

My two friends, take a detour from leading your riding camels to water

And as for that which I must strain myself:

Is it that I searched for dignity in Kharqāʾ?

And as for that which possesses me with madness:

What is wrong with your eye from which tears are falling?[108] (Iṣfahānī 18: 26-27)

The first two verses Dhū ‘l-Rumma cites correspond to descriptive desert scenes and amatory verse, respectively. While descriptive verses come most easily to him, love poetry requires great effort. It is praise poetry, however, that possesses him with madness, sug-

[108] Original text:

من شعري ما طاوعني فيه القول وساعدني ومنه ما أجهدت نفسي فيه ومنه ما جننت به جنوناً فأما ما طاوعني القول فيه فقولي:

خليلي عوجاً من صدور الرواحل

وأما ما أجهدت فيه نفسي فقولي:

أأن توسمت من خرقاء منزلة

أما ما جننت به جنوناً فقولي:

ما بال عينك منها الدمع ينسكب

gesting mad inspiration. Indeed, this *khabar* is followed by one in which we learn that the verse that caused him madness is also the line which the poet Jarīr (d. 728) wished to be attributed to him because it is the one in which "his muse (*shaytān*) was his aid in it" (Iṣfahānī 18: 27).[109]

If the poet who excelled above all others at his time in innovating upon the tradition of Arabic poetry while demonstrating mastery of the Bedouin tongue and culture from within which it emerged, and upon which Islam and the Umayyad empire drew a cultural identity, could not successfully compete with his fellow poets during his lifetime, how could poetry itself succeed? In "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu," Iṣfahānī calls attention to how Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry problematizes poetry itself and raises questions about the future of poetry in the nascent Islamic society. Such anxieties about the future of Arabic poetry would have been particularly resonant in the tenth century when the *Aghānī*'s contemporary audience was facing the consequences of the decentralization of the Abbasid caliphal courts, including an uncertain future for court musicians and the living tradition they embodied. In calling attention to Dhu 'l-Rumma's in-between status as a *Jāhilī*-style poet living in the Islamic period, the "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu" suggests that the ways in which poetry is assessed and understood requires drastic reas-

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[109] Original text:

كان جرير يقول: ما أحببت أن ينسب إلي من شعر ذي الرمة إلا قوله: ما بال عينك منها الماء ينسكب فإن شيطانه كان له فيها ناصحاً.

sessment at times of drastic social change. Kumayt credits Dhū 'l-Rumma with relating the greatness of "Bedouin knowledge" and "the intricacies of reason and the treasures stored in the mind of those of sound judgment" in his poetry (Iṣfahānī 18: 12), and the cosmopolitan people of Kufa exclaim that they had never seen anyone "better at, more eloquent in, or knowledgeable of obscure terms (bi-gharībin) than him" (Iṣfahānī 18: 38). His poetry, it seems, would help spread Bedouin knowledge in Islamic society and serve as a source for this crucial cultural and linguistic knowledge. However, "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu," as is discussed in the next section, suggests an uneasiness with accepting such a function for Dhū 'l-Rumma's poetry and plays with the paradox of "authenticity."

THE "AUTHENTICITY" OF DHŪ 'L-RUMMA

Although the words "*badw*" or "*ahl al-bādiya,*" used in "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu" to refer to the notion of "Bedouin" derive from *b-d-w*, a root implying openness and "going forth into the open country" (Lane 170), a Bedouin's legitimacy as a source of knowledge was premised upon his purity and fixedness, i.e., his *aṣāla,* at least by the tenth century. The word *aṣāla,* which I intend by the term "authenticity," derives from ʾ-ṣ-l, denoting "root" (Lane 34) or "the lowest part of everything (*asfalu kulli shayʾin*)"[110] (Ibn Manẓūr 89). However, as Jonathan Shannon points out, "the use of *aṣāla* to mean authenticity reflects a decidedly modern sensibility" (57). The medieval

[110] Original text:

أسفل كل شيء

usage of the word, rather, implies "notions of rootedness, fixedness, permanence, and lineage" (Shannon 57). The question of "authenticity," then, becomes one of "fixedness." This association between the Bedouin identity and "authenticity" is particularly evident in medieval discourses on language. If a Bedouin "had mixed (*khālaṭ*) with settled people (*ahl al-ḥaḍar*)," ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Maṭar explains based on an anecdote that Ibn Jinnī (d. 1002) recorded in his *Kitāb al-Khaṣāʾiṣ fī ʿIlm Uṣūl ʿArabiyya* (*Book of Special Features of Arabic Grammar*), "then taking linguistic knowledge from him is prohibited because his skin would have become soft (*lāna*)" (Maṭar 45).[111] In other words, mixing with the people of the city would put into question the Bedouin's "authenticity" as a source of "pure," "unmediated" knowledge.

The importance of Bedouin "purity" reached a new pinnacle in the tenth century, when the use of living Bedouin informants by linguistic experts as arbiters in questions of Arabic language disappeared (Versteegh 64). As Kees Versteegh points out, from the tenth century on, references to the "language of the Bedouin still abounded in the books of the grammarians, but these were no longer connected with any living speech" (64). Grammarians, instead, relied on Bedouins of the past, and as Dhū 'l-Rumma "sealed" poetry, he had been a common source of linguistic knowledge.[112] Scholars also drew upon

[111] Original text:

فإذا خالط البدوي أهل الحضر امتنعوا عن الأخذ عنه، لأنه »لانَ جلدُه.«

[112] He is mentioned over 150 times in al-Farāhīdī's (d. 786) *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* (*Book of ʿAyn*), over 40 times in Sībawayh's (d. 796) *al-Kitāb* (*The Book*), over 300 times in al-

Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s poetry for other sources of knowledge, such as botanical[113] and zoological[114]. Nicholson argues that the philologists in the period after Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s death “delighted in his antique and difficult style, and praised him far above his merits” precisely because he was seen as “the last important representative of the pure Bedouin school” (246). However, as what were accepted as reliable living sources of the “pure Bedouin tradition” were dwindling in the tenth century, “Dhikr Dhī ‘l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu” points to renewed anxiety in the tenth century about the reliability of past sources, namely Dhū ‘l-Rumma and his poetic legacy.

“Dhikr Dhī ‘l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu” reads like a compilation of literary criticism on Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s poetic contribution, and thus, the plentiful comments about his physical appearance, character, and social interactions that Iṣfahānī includes ask to be read as part and parcel of this inquiry into his oeuvre, even when doing so is called into question. As mentioned above, Arabic poetry was directly linked to a notion of Arabic culture that was based on Bedouin life in the desert. His esoteric Bedouin knowledge, as seen in both his arcane language and desert descriptions, reinforces and is reinforced by

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Zamasharī’s (d. 1143) *Asās al-Balāgha* (*Foundations of Rhetoric*), and over 1000 times in Ibn Manẓūr’s (d. 1311) *Lisān al-ʿArab* (*The Language of the Arabs*).

[113] He is mentioned about 40 times in Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī’s (d. 896) *Kitāb al-Nabāt* (*Book of Plants*).

[114] He is mentioned about 50 times in al-Jāḥiẓ’s (d. 869) *Kitāb al-Hayawān* (*Book of Animals*)

his perceived identity as a Bedouin. The attention paid in the *akhbār* to Dhū ʻl-Rumma's physical appearance, personality, and social traits probe the question of his Bedouin-ness. While the chapters in the *Aghānī that* Iṣfahānī dedicates to Majnūn Laylā and Qays Lubnā, who were famed primarily as love poets, focus on their love stories, "Dhikr Dhī ʻl-Rumma wa Khabaruhu," dedicated to the personality known as the last great Bedouin poet, explores the question of his status as a "true" Bedouin.

In exploring this question, however, "Dhikr Dhī ʻl-Rumma wa Khabaruhu" complicates the question of his rootedness in Bedouin culture. In other words, we discover that that which seems to complicate his "authenticity" can also be understood as contributing to it. Even the notion of Bedouin rootedness, then, lacks rootedness and reminds us of the wandering, not fixedness, associated with the Bedouin. In particular, the "Dhikr Dhī ʻl-Rumma wa Khabaruhu" examines three aspects of his Bedouin "authenticity": his rootedness in the desert, his illiteracy, and his direct knowledge of what he describes in his poetry.

PARTY-CRASHING IN BASRA AND KUFA

Early on in the chapter, Iṣfahānī relates *akhbār* that stage in which his mixing with the people of the city. In particular, he relates that Dhū ʻl-Rumma was a party-crasher (*ṭufaylī*), who would "often come to the city region (*al-ḥaḍar*) and stay in Kufa

and Basra" (Iṣfahānī 18: 9).[115] He also reports a *khabar* from Ibn Saʿīd al-Kindī who relates having heard Ibn ʿAyyāsh saying: "Someone told me he saw Dhū 'l-Rumma party-crashing, taking food at banquets" (Iṣfahānī 18: 9).[116] As noted above, to mix with the people of the city would supposedly problematize the "authenticity" of a Bedouin. Such mixing need not be one of blood for this invalidation. Even eating the food of the settled folk could supposedly delegitimize a Bedouin's knowledge, as we learn in an account al-Zubaydī (d. 989) includes in his *Ṭabaqāt al-Naḥwiyyīn wa al-Lughawiyyīn* (*Classes of Grammarians and Lexicographers*) in which al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 828) refuses to accept the correctness of the word "*zawjah*" (172). When al-Sadrī protests by citing a line of poetry said by Dhū 'l-Rumma, al-Aṣmaʿī maintains his rejection because, as he says, "Dhū 'l-Rumma ate salty foods and legumes in taverns (*ḥawānīt al-baqqālīn*)" (al-Zubaydī 172).[117] In other words, Dhū 'l-Rumma participated in the culture of non-Bedouins by eating their food at their establishments and thus cannot be relied on as a trustworthy source of Bedouin culture.

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[115] Original text:

وكان ذو الرمة كثيراً ما يأتي الحضر فيقيم بالكوفة والبصرة وكان طفيلياً.

[116] Original text:

حدثني ابن سعيد الكندي قال: سمعت ابن عياش يقول: حدثني من رأى ذا الرمة طفيلياً يأتي العرسات.

[117] Original text:

ذو الرمة أكل المالح والبقل في حوانيت البقالين.

In the stories included in "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu," however, Dhū 'l-Rumma's time in the city is mentioned in relation to his party-crashing habits, which, although indicative of mixing, might also be perceived as reinforcing his Bedouin identity. In a chapter of al-Baghdādī's *Taṭfīl* (*Party-Crashing*) called "Bāb Fīman Ḥamida al-Taṭfīl wa Iḥtajja l-Ahlihi wa Dhakarahum bi-l-Jamīl" ("Those Who Praise, Excuse, and Speak Well of Party-Crashing"), al-Aṣmaʿī suggests how Bedouin culture might perceive the practice of party-crashing:

> Al-Aṣmaʿī said: A Bedouin (*aʿrābī*) heard some people talking [about party-crashers] and said: "Who are these party-crashing people?" It was said: "People who come to eat food without having been invited. So, he said: "These are truly a friendly (*kirām*) people"[118] (79)

The Bedouin in this anecdote exhibits naiveté with respect to the conventions of parties and social etiquette and views the party-crasher positively for joining a banquet even without an invitation.

The "motif of the bedouin" in the "Arabic tradition," as Lawrence Conrad argues, involves "a simple rather uncouth individual portrayed as a guileless rustic, who is befuddled by a simple problem, fails to see a basic point, or naively behaves in a totally un-

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[118] Original text:

قَالَ الأصمعي: سمع أعرابي قوما يذكرون ، فَقَالَ : من بنو طفيل هَؤُلاءِ ؟ فقيل : قوم يأتون الطعام من غَيْر أَن يدعوا إِلَيْهِ ، فَقَالَ : هَؤُلاءِ والله قوم كرام.

acceptable way, for example, urinating in the mosque" (407). Conrad presents the Bedouin as an outsider among "settled" people and suggests that he is perceived as so deeply "rooted" in his ways that he unselfconsciously behaves inappropriately, guilelessly performing his identity as such. Like the Bedouin in al-Aṣmaʿī's story, then, Dhū 'l-Rumma's habit of party-crashing, while suggestive of mixing might also be understood as demonstrating his Bedouin guilelessness; he is so naive and rustic that he shares food uninvited based on his Bedouin notions of hospitality and community.

LITERACY

Iṣfahānī also complicates the question of Dhū 'l-Rumma's literacy in "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu." Because the ability to read and write is related to mixing with the learned people of the city and suggests an ability to gain knowledge through books rather than personal firsthand experience, what is at stake in the question of a Bedouin poet's literacy, as Michael Cook points out, is his "authenticity" (496). This sentiment is echoed by the twelfth century literary theorist al-Kalāʿī (d. 1148) in his *Ihkām Ṣanʿat al-Kalām* (*Perfecting the Art of Speech*), in which he argues that scholars considered the use of writing among Bedouin shameful at that time because of the artificiality (*takalluf*) of writing, which would inevitably lead the poet to compose "unnatural" and "affected" work (Cook 496).

Iṣfahānī present two *akhbār* that explicitly comment on Dhū 'l-Rumma's ability to read and write. In the first, Muḥārib bin Dithār (d. 734), a Kufan judge, is quoted as saying:

> Dhū ʻl-Rumma would read and write but would hide that fact. It was said to him: "How do you say it: Uzayr ibn Allah or Uzayr bin Allah?" He said: "The one that has more letters."[119] (Iṣfahānī 18: 34)

In revealing Dhū ʻl-Rumma's secret ability to read and write, Muḥārib offers as evidence what appears to have been an unintentional slip on the part of the supposedly illiterate poet. In fulfilling his role as the eloquent Bedouin who naturally, i.e., without learning, possesses the answers to questions of grammar and pronunciation, Dhū ʻl-Rumma seems to be tricked into revealing his ability to read and write, as his response refers to spelling rather than pronunciation. While Muḥārib seems either to take for granted that the reason for hiding this ability is known to his audience or to be puzzled himself by the poet's ruse, in the *khabar* that follows Dhū ʻl-Rumma suggests why it is that he is keen to keep his literacy concealed:

> ʿĪsā bin ʿUmar said: Dhū ʻl-Rumma said to me: "Place a nominative vowel marker on this letter." So I said to him: "You know how to write?" He said, putting his hand on his mouth: "Keep this hidden for me because we consider it a fault (*ʿīb*)."[120] (Iṣfahānī 18: 34)

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[119] Original text:

كان ذو الرمة يقرأ ويكتب ويكتم ذلك فقيل له: كيف تقول: عزير ابن الله أو عزير بن الله فقال: أكثرهما حروفاً.

[120] Original text:

The Basran grammarian ʿĪsā bin ʿUmar al-Thaqafī (d. 766) stumbles upon Dhū 'l-Rumma's ability by chance and the poet asks him to keep this quiet. Here it is clear that ʿĪsā bin ʿUmar had been initially under the impression that Dhū 'l-Rumma was illiterate and that he had sought to give such an impression. The reason for this deception, he admits, is that his people consider such a skill to be shameful. Presumably the "we" to which Dhū 'l-Rumma refers is the Bedouin community, or specifically the Bedouin of al-Yamāma, his birthplace in the eastern region of the Arabian Peninsula. While admitting his ability to read and write, he asserts his affiliation with and intimate knowledge of Bedouin customs. While his knowledge of the alphabet suggests mixing with people of the city, and thus the impurity of his poetic language, his interest in hiding that knowledge could be understood as a conscious, self-aware attempt to deceive and bolster his Bedouin identity and as evidence of his rootedness in Bedouin ethics.

The cultural significance of illiteracy can be further appreciated by considering the controversy around the Prophet Muḥammad's supposed inability to read and write,[121]

قال عيسى بن عمر: قال لي ذو الرمة: ارفع هذا الحرف فقلت له: أتكتب فقال بيده على فيه: اكتم علي فإنه عندنا عيب.

[121] The Qurʿān has been resorted to in order to both establish and discredit the claim of Muḥammad's illiteracy. Sūrat al-Aʿrāf, for example, includes a verse that begins: "Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered (*al-ummī*) prophet,…" (*Sahīh International* 7:157). This verse seems to celebrate Muḥammad's illiteracy, but detractors, both medie-

which is, as Günther argues, "a crucial feature of faith and spirituality in Islam" (16) because it is often taken as proof of his prophecy (Fitzpatrick 286). The twelfth century theologian and philosopher Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209) expresses the importance of Muḥammad's illiteracy in relation to the miracle of the Qurʾān in his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (*Grand Commentary*):

> If [Muḥammad] had been proficient in writing (*al-khaṭṭ*) and reading (*al-qirāʾa)* , he would have been accused perhaps of having studied (*ṭālaʿa*) the books of the ancestors and having acquired this knowledge (*hādhihi al-ʿulūm*) through studying (*muṭālaʿa)* . So when he brought forth this great Qurʾān, which is filled with copious knowledge, without any learning or studying, it was among the miracles (*muʿjizāt*).[122] (87)

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val and modern, point out other possible meanings of *ummī*, such as "Arabian," "Meccan," "layman," and "heathen" (Günther 1), suggesting that Muḥammad was not "unlettered." The opening of Surat al-ʿAlaq is further used as contradictory evidence that Muḥammad was clearly literate: "Read (*iqraʾ*) in the name of your Lord…" (*Sahīh International* 96:1). This verse, while seeming to presume the Prophet's ability to read, has also been understood as evidence that he learned to read and write over the course of the revelation.

[122] Original text:

أنه لو كان يحسن الخط والقراءة لصار متهما في أنه ربما طالع كتب الأولين فحصل هذه العلوم من تلك المطالعة، فلما أتى بهذا القرآن العظيم المشتمل على العلوم الكثيرة من غير تعلم ولا مطالعة كان ذلك من المعجزات،

As al-Rāzī eloquently explains, the notion that Muḥammad could not read or write upon receiving the Qurʾān enhances the miracle of the revelation. It contributes to the sense that the knowledge presented in the Qurʿān is inspired and not a product of learning. Similarly, the perception that Dhū ʻl-Rumma was an illiterate Bedouin enhances the sense of his poetry's inspired purity, and, as mentioned above, it was precisely his poetry that he and others, such as Jarīr, considered inspired that earned the greatest admiration.

What is at stake in doubting Muḥammad's illiteracy before the revelations is belief in the "authenticity" of his prophecy; questioning that of Dhū ʻl-Rumma has implications for the "authenticity" of his status as the last representative of the Bedouin tradition, unadulterated by learning and city culture. Nadia Abbott points out that "the dogma of Muḥammad's illiteracy" was particularly evident in the tenth-century controversy around a *hadīth* from Ibn Ḥanbal, Bukhārī, and Dārimī that reports that Muḥammad "'wrote with his own hand' some of the alterations in the preamble of the Treaty of Ḥudaibīyah" (3). At the time Iṣfahānī curated the *Aghānī*, then, raising questions about Dhū ʻl-Rumma's literacy would likely have cued comparisons to this debate. By raising questions about Dhū ʻl-Rumma's illiteracy, "Dhikr Dhī ʻl-Rumma wa Khabaruhu" links Dhū ʻl-Rumma to Muḥammad, whose own Bedouin identity in many ways gave that culture its weight in Islamic society.

INSPIRED KNOWLEDGE

Iṣfahānī once again complicates the question of "authentic" Bedouinness in "Dhikr Dhī ʻl-Rumma wa Khabaruhu" in the *akhbār* he curates that point to concerns that his knowledge had been gained from direct observation, such that the source of his

knowledge was his own experience. The knowledge presumably required to both believably describe desert life and deftly employ an arcane Arabic lexicon in verse is indicative of the Bedouin character that defines Dhū ʻl-Rumma's celebrity. However, his "authenticity" as a Bedouin poet is not premised only upon his possession of this performed special knowledge, but on his provincial, i.e., "natural," acquisition of it, as suggested by al-Kalāʿī's comments about literacy. Dhū ʻl-Rumma's Bedouin persona, and the admiration associated with it, requires that both his linguistic and desert life knowledge be unadulterated by study and other sources.

This interest in Dhū ʻl-Rumma's direct knowledge of that to which he bears witness in his poetry is well-illustrated in an anecdote that al-Faḍl bin Isḥāq al-Hāshimī presents in the chapter:

> Al-Faḍl bin Isḥāq al-Hāshimi told us a story related by one of his grandfather's companions, who said: I saw Dhū ʻl-Rumma in the Basran market Mirbad. A man challenged him, ridiculing him, and said: "O Bedouin (*yā aʿrābī*), have you borne witness to that which you have not seen?" He said: "Yes." He said: "To what?" He said: "I bear witness that your father fucked (*nāka*) your mother."[123] (Iṣfahānī 18: 13)

[123] Original text:

حدثنا الفضل بن إسحاق الهاشمي عن مولى لجده قال: رأيت ذا الرمة بسوق المربد وقد عارضه رجلٌ يهزأ به فقال له: يا أعرابي أتشهد بما لم تر قال: نعم قال: بماذا قال: أشهد أن أباك ناك أمك.

Al-Faḍl bin Isḥāq al-Hāshimī reports that this exchange took place in Mirbad, a camel market that had become a well-known stage for poetic performance and exchange. In particular, people would gather in Mirbad "to observe the game of flyting (*naqāʾiḍ*)" (Dayf 186). Not only is this *khabar* set in this market, which was being established as a stage for poetic rivalry and lampoon (Jorgensen 62-89), the narrator tells us that the unnamed man's question was intended to ridicule and challenge Dhū 'l-Rumma. The man's use of the epithet "Bedouin" establishes both that the poet was perceived as a Bedouin outsider and that his question intends to challenge that perception. He poses this question as a challenge for Dhū 'l-Rumma to defend his public persona as a Bedouin, drawing a direct link between the title of "Bedouin" and the importance of direct observation. Dhū 'l-Rumma's response acts in one sense as both a confirmation of his Bedouinness and his status as a learned urbanite. He succeeds in embarrassing a man whose aim was to embarrass him, and in doing so with a vulgar response, he enacts the "uncouth" behavior of the Bedouin persona. The verb *nāka* is an impolite term for sexual intercourse,[124] and its

[124] Although the verb *nāka* and its root *n-y-k* are likely considered more vulgar today (modern dictionaries tend not to list the root at all) than they were in the seventh or tenth centuries, (respectively, Dhū 'l-Rumma's and Iṣfahānī's eras) the impoliteness of this verb in the earlier centuries of Arabo-Islamic society is suggested by the absence of a definition in the entries for *nāka* in Al-Ṣāḥib bin ʿAbbād's *Muḥīṭ fī al-Lugha* (10th century), Al-Jawharī's *al-Siḥāḥ* (10th century), Al-Azharī's *Tahdhīb al-Lugha* (10th century), and Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān al-ʿArab* (1290), which opt instead to list its meaning as "known"

crudeness is enhanced here by its use in reference to the interlocutor's mother and father. This response also "naively" neglects to address the intended question, namely, whether Dhū 'l-Rumma bears witness in his poetry, presumably, to that which he has not seen with his own eyes. That is, he seems to "fail to see the basic point," a common characteristic of the Bedouin motif as argued by Conrad. At the same time, however, DR admits that he has indeed borne witness to that which he has not seen with his own eyes, suggesting that his Bedouin knowledge is perhaps less than "pure."

THE PARADOX OF "AUTHENTICITY"

The complications that the *Aghānī* presents regarding Dhū 'l-Rumma's Bedouinness—in particular, complications with regard to his rootedness in the desert, his illiteracy, and his desert experience—also paradoxically seem to reinforce his Bedouinness. If to be Bedouin is to be "authentic," i.e., "rooted" (*aṣīl*), as the requirements of rootedness in the desert, illiteracy, and direct knowledge suggest, why is the notion of Bedouinness so difficult to fix in place? Does his habit of party-crashing demonstrate his mixing or his outsider status? Does he hide his possible literacy out of a conscious awareness of his self-presentation or out of a true affiliation and familiarity with the taboos of Bedouin culture? Does his response to the anonymous man in the crowd at Mirbad cunningly

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(*maʿrūf*) and/or delineate its word forms (2543). In another chapter in the *Aghānī*, a woman is described as covering her face when a man uses the word when speaking with her (Iṣfahānī 289; vol. XI) ("Akhbār Abī Naḍīr wa Nasabuhu"). It is also notable that the poem for which al-Mutannabī was reportedly killed includes the verb three times.

evade the question and knowingly reinforce his Bedouinness or instead does it naively miss the point and demonstrate his guileless inappropriateness and uncouthness? Whether or not Dhū ʻl-Rumma embodies a true Bedouin becomes an unproductive question in "Dhikr Dhī ʻl-Rumma wa Khabaruhu." Iṣfahānī's curation of *akhbār* does not simply leave these questions and Dhū ʻl-Rumma's Bedouinness open but challenges their relevance and usefulness.

The stories examined above reinvigorate the sense of the Bedouin as a rootless wanderer whose "authenticity" defies final determination, as this determination implies seeking rootedness in rootlessness. We find an inherent contradiction in seeking "authentic" knowledge, as finding it involves its corruption. Rather than reveal Dhū ʻl-Rumma to be either an "authentic" or "inauthentic" embodiment of the Bedouin, "Dhikr Dhī ʻl-Rumma wa Khabaruhu" moves away from the question of "authenticity" and instead calls attention to the complexity of the notion of identity. Iṣfahānī further explores this complexity for the poet's identity in the stories of plagiarism and false attributions he relates in "Dhikr Dhī ʻl-Rumma wa Khabaruhu".

WANDERING VERSE

In "Dhikr Dhī ʻl-Rumma wa Khabaruhu," Iṣfahānī calls attention to the practices of plagiarism and false attributions among poets, and in doing so, points to another level of absurdity inherent in any attempt to determine a poet's "authenticity," especially when such an attempt is made in order to base judgments of poetry upon this determination. The chapter of the *Aghānī* that Iṣfahānī to Dhū ʻl-Rumma relates stories that dramatize both plagiarism and false attribution, and we encounter four specific variations of these

practices: Dhū ‘l-Rumma adopting verses composed by his three less famous brothers, al-Farazdaq adopting (“*intaḥala*”) verses composed by Dhū ‘l-Rumma, other poets accusing Dhū ‘l-Rumma of stealing verses, and others falsely attributing verses to him. I explore two of these variations below in order to understand how Iṣfahānī presents these practices and the implications of his presentation for the role of the author in the poetic tradition.

The two *akhbār* that detail Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s interaction with al-Farazdaq about his adopting certain verses foreground Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s acquiescence when confronted with al-Farazdaq making claim to these verses. In the first, Abū Yaḥyā al-Ḍabī reports that Dhū ‘l-Rumma once recited four lines of his that had “breadth, purpose, and depth of meaning” (Iṣfahānī 18: 21) to al-Farazdaq. Upon hearing them, al-Farazdaq exclaims: “You surely should recite them again as they are more fitting of me than you!” (Iṣfahānī 18: 21). Al-Farazdaq makes his claim to these verses by declaring their fittingness to his own style of composition. These four lines of poetry, which speak of the poet’s pride, heroism, and loyalty to the Banū Tamīm, could easily be assumed to belong to al-Farazdaq, who was from the Banū Dārim, a branch of Tamīm, and famed for his poetry of self-glorification (*fakhr*). Dhū ‘l-Rumma, on the other hand, was no more skilled at *fakhr* than he was at *madḥ*, and was from the Banū ʿAdī, not Tamīm. This narration continues, reporting Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s response to al-Farazdaq’s claim: “I swear,” he responds, “I don’t; rather, I only recite them as yours” (Iṣfahānī 18: 21). The narration ends, and the narrator deems the four lines in question to belong to “one of al-Farazdaq’s poems” (Iṣfahānī 18: 22). This first story of how al-Farazdaq adopts these lines points to the primacy of poetic style over poetic “authenticity.” Dhū ‘l-Rumma agrees that he has

no right to these lines despite having composed them because they do not fit with his public persona and the rest of his poetic output.

In *The Author and His Double*, Abdelfattah Kilito relates a similar incidence of al-Farazdaq's adoption of poetry composed by another. Kilito's example involves a line of poetry composed by the *ʿudhrī* poet Jamīl that bestows great praise on the poet's tribe. As Jamīl was famed for his erotic verses and al-Farazdaq, as we know, was famed for his *fakhr*, Jamīl, Kilito tells us "*should not have spoken* the line" (21). He continues:

> Al-Farazdaq, on the other hand *could have spoken* the line, because he represents a tribe with a real claim to glory. The line befits him, which suffices to make him its author…We do not expect [Jamīl] to compose a verse of vaunting poetry: it is not his "way" (*ṭarīqa*), nor does it fit the image that has been constructed for him. The line cited here sullies the purity of that image; it dangles like a useless and awkward appendage from the corpus of his poetry; it lurks like a poor, eccentric relative, unneeded because unconnected to the rest of Jamīl's oeuvre, a mis-matched pearl in the necklace. Claimed by al-Farazdaq, however, the line finds it-self on familiar territory, among relatives and friends. Al-Farazdaq may therefore claim it without scruple or hesitation…Had Jamīl misattributed [the line] to al-Farazdaq, no one would have taken offense. Had al-Farazdaq credited it to Jamīl, no one would have believed him. Indeed, had the line simply wandered, lost and anonymous, it would doubtless have been attributed to al-Farazdaq. (Kilito 21-22)

In this passage, Kilito delivers the particular sense of authorship that dictated conventions of poetic attribution among the poets of the Umayyad period. The poet who composes a

certain set of verses does not necessarily have legitimate claim over it. If a set of verses is more befitting of another poet's style, that poet may make a legitimate claim to them. Otherwise, those lines may and likely will be attributed to him by others anyway. Without such attribution, the meaning and value of the poetry would be lost. This is precisely the sense of authorship suggested by this first story in which al-Farazdaq takes verses composed by Dhū 'l-Rumma. In the face of al-Farazdaq's claim, Dhū 'l-Rumma quickly surrenders any claim to the four lines without protest. He already attributes them to al-Farazdaq, he says, aware of the correct attribution even before encountering al-Farazdaq's request.

The next *khabar* offers an alternative series of events which results in al-Farazdaq taking these same lines from Dhū 'l-Rumma. In this telling, the narrator complicates and foregrounds the question of poetic ownership throughout the *khabar*:

> Al-Ḍaḥḥāk al-Fiqīmi said: When I was in Kāẓima, Dhū 'l-Rumma was reciting his poem in which he says:
>
> Two masked riders had arrived from a house there and they stopped. When Dhū 'l-Rumma finished reciting, al-Farazdaq uncovered his face and said to his narrator: "O son of the desert (ʿUbayd), you can have these lines." Dhū 'l-Rumma said to him: "I beseech of you by God O Abū Firās[125]!" He replied: "I have more right to them than you" and adopted these four lines.[126] (Iṣfahānī 18: 22)

[125] Abū Firās is another name for Farazdaq.

[126] Original text:

First, the narrator refers to these lines as belonging to "his poem" (*qaṣīdatahu*), referring to Dhū 'l-Rumma's poem, and thus attributes them to Dhū 'l-Rumma. The, he refers to Dhū 'l-Rumma as "his narrator" (*rāwiyatihi*), that is, the narrator of al-Farazdaq's poetry. As the term *Rāwiya* implies one that recites or transmits someone else's poetry, the use of this epithet for Dhū 'l-Rumma implies that the poetry belongs to al-Farazdaq. By ending the narrative with the words "he adopted (*intaḥala*) these four lines," however, the narrator now suggests that the lines only came to belong to al-Farazdaq after this exchange with Dhū 'l-Rumma.

Ownership of poetic verse is not fixed here, and instead, depends on perception. Al-Farazdaq, upon hearing the four lines, disingenuously offers them to Dhū 'l-Rumma, as if they already belonged to him: "you can have these lines," he tells Dhū 'l-Rumma, treating him, as the narrator points out, as a transmitter of his verse. As in the first version of this story, Dhū 'l-Rumma does not put up any real protest in this narration to al-Farazdaq's annexing of these lines. His acquiescence, however, is more reluctant here: "I beseech of you by God" (*nashadtuka allāhī)* , he responds, which seems to imply that al-Farazdaq find the answer to this indirect request to adopt these lines with God. In other words, Dhū 'l-Rumma responds as if to say "take them, if you must," and in doing so,

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الضحاك الفقيمي قال: بينا أنا بكاظمة وذو الرمة ينشد قصيدته التي يقول فيها: إذا راكبان قد تدليا من نقب كاظمة مقنعان فوقفا فلما فرغ ذو الرمة حسر الفرزدق عن وجهه وقال لراويته: يا عبيد اضمم إليك هذه الأبيات. قال له ذو الرمة: نشدتك الله يا أبا فراس! فقال له: أنا أحق بها منك وانتحل منها هذه الأربعة الأبيات.

acknowledges that he has no agency in the matter. The choice is not his to make. In staking his claim to these four lines in front of an audience—his unnamed riding companion, our narrator al-Ḍaḥḥāk al-Fiqīmi, and presumably others—al-Farazdaq gives the impression that these lines were already his, and Dhū ‘l-Rumma is impotent to change this perception. Whereas the first story emphasizes the fittingness of these verses with al-Farazdaq’s style (*ṭarīqa)* , and thus the dominance of style over actual composition in determining ownership, this story emphasizes the role of perception in such a determination. Recalling the questions about Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s Bedouinness, then, this story suggests that the perception that the legendary Dhū ‘l-Rumma was illiterate, for example, is more important than whether or not the poet actually knew how to read and write.

Iṣfahānī presents us with a story in “Dhikr Dhī ‘l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu” in which the poet Ruʾba accuses Dhū ‘l-Rumma of stealing his poetry, and the way in which Ruʾbah’s complaint is received suggests another key element in determining poetic ownership:

> Muḥammad bin Abī Bakr al-Makhzūmī said: Ruʾba said: “Every time I said poetry (*shiʿr*), Dhū ‘l-Rumma would steal it (*saraqahu*).” It was said to him: “How’s that (*mā dhāk*)?” He said: I said:
>
> * The death rattle (*al-shahīq*) lives and the breaths (*al-anfās*) die. *
>
> And he said:
>
> They miscarry in the desert without knowing
>
> Every wet-skinned aborted fetus
>
> * The death rattle (*al-shahīq*) lives and the links (*al-awṣāl*) die. *

So I said to him: "Well, his, by God, is of better quality than yours, if he did steal it from you." So he said: "What grief you have caused me (*dhālika aghammu liyya*)."[127] (Iṣfahānī 18: 34-35)

Ruʾba complains that Dhū 'l-Rumma steals poetry from him, giving as an example a line he says Dhū 'l-Rumma took and modified. Rather than sympathizing with Ruʾba, however, the narrator declares that Dhū 'l-Rumma's modification is an improvement upon his original verse, trivializing Ruʾbah's accusation of thievery (*sariqa)* . This story implies that improving upon a previously said verse grants a poet the right to claim ownership to the verse he improved. Not only do style and perception dictate ownership, then, but the demonstration of superior poetic skill can obviate the sin of thievery.

Plagiarism is inevitable in literature, and this phenomenon was particularly common among early Islamic poets and medieval Arabic scholars. The literary critic Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrwānī (d. 1064), for example, declared that although "the poet's reliance on

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[127] Original text:

محمد بن أبي بكر المخزومي قال: قال رؤبة: كما قلت شعراً سرقه ذو الرمة فقيل له: وما ذاك قال: قلت:

* حي الشهيق ميت الأنفاس *

فقال هو:

يطرحن بالمهارق الاغفال كل جهيض لثق السربال

* حي الشهيق ميت الأوصال *

فقلت له: فقوله والله أجود من قولك وإن كان سرقه منك فقال: ذلك أغم لي.

plagiarism is stupidity and weakness…to abandon all previous poetic ideas is ignorance" (395).[128] Instead, he suggests, a bit of both invention and borrowing is preferable (Ibn Rashīq 395). Furthermore, as the *akhbār* dramatizing these practices suggest, because poetry is shared, borrowed, modified and taken, the "authenticity" (*aṣāla)* of the author and his story become irrelevant. That is, if the question of "authenticity" is one of "fixedness," these *akhbār* of "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu" suggest that the author of a verse is anything but "authentic."

None of this is to say that the idea of the author and his story become irrelevant in the face of these practices. On the contrary, the *Aghānī* presents poetry as part and parcel with the lore that surrounds it and the poet to whom the poetry has been attributed. Rather, it is the notion of "fixedness" itself that becomes irrelevant. As these stories of "false" attribution and plagiarism demonstrate, poetic style and skill, a poet's public persona, and the perception of the audience, all of which are subject to change and alteration, dictate how poetry should be received and understood. While the author-function is one that categorizes poetry by theme, style, period, and poetic persona and enhances the meaning of poetry, it is by no means a tool of "authentication."

CONCLUSIONS

[128] Original text:

واتكال الشاعر على السرقة بلادة وعجز، وتركه كل معنى سبق إليه جهل.

Why raise doubts about Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s authenticity if “authenticity,” i.e., “rootedness,” is irrelevant? First, his rootedness in Bedouin tradition is a central concern for the reception of his poetry, which embodies a *Jāhilī* mode during the Islamic era and performs esoteric Bedouin knowledge for an increasingly cosmopolitan society. Arabic poetry of the Umayyad and Abbasid periods was consciously linked to a romanticized Bedouin *Jāhilī* past, a past that was alien “to the family heritage of the Muslims,…the daily language, [and] the deeply urban patterns of the bureaucracy and of the other elements in the population which now turned to honouring it” (Hodgson 296-7). From the period between the mid-seventh century and the twelfth century, literary scholars began to collect and edit old poetry, “dedicated as much to its philological niceties as to its aesthetic delights” (Hodgson 297). This process sought to root old Arabic poetry in a fixed past that could be mined for important cultural knowledge. Philological niceties and aesthetic delights abound in Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s poetry; but because he and his poetry are situated between the pre-Islamic and Islamic and between the desert and city, his rootedness in this cultural tradition become of particular concern.

Second, it is in voicing these doubts that Iṣfahānī illustrates the absurdity of looking for fixedness in Arabic poetry. The challenges to Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s “authenticity” as a Bedouin end up both reinforcing and complicating his rootedness, dramatizing the paradox of Bedouin “authenticity.” Finally, in raising these doubts, Iṣfahānī finds room for them in the legend of Dhū ‘l-Rumma. He literally creates space for their expression in “Dhikr Dhī ‘l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu” where Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s Bedouin identity is not diminished by these doubts, but instead is complicated by them, opening up his poetry to

a wider range of interpretation and inquiry. By releasing Dhū ‘l-Rumma’s poetry from the binds of “authenticity” and drawing attention to the way in which it problematizes poetry at a time of critical social change, “Dhikr Dhī ‘l-Rumma wa Khabaruhu” attempts not to resolve the divergence surrounding the reception of his poetry but to appreciate its openness.

Chapter 5

"Sincerity" in the Story of Kuthayyir ʿAzza

INTRODUCTION

Kuthayyir ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (d. 723), known for his unrequited love for ʿAzza bint Ḥumayl, is a character who inspired much controversy during his time. In the *Aghānī* chapter dedicated to Kuthayyir ʿAzza, "The Narrative of Kuthayyir's Lore and Lineage" ("Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi"), we find various *akhbār* framing Kuthayyir as disingenuous and transgressive of social norms: a haughty religious extremist who once claimed to be the reincarnation of Jonah (*Yūnus*); a target of regular mockery for his foolishness, ugliness, short stature, and stupidity; a man who satirized others and physically attacked a man after inviting satirize; and a poet who boldly recited unwelcome poetry for a woman whom he claimed to love and whose love for her was doubted. The text is filled with unflattering framings of his character and appearance (e.g. "I never saw anyone more stupid than Kuthayyir" (*mā raʾaytu qaṭ aḥmaqa min kuthayyir*) (Iṣfahānī 9: 27); "He was short and ugly" (*kān qaṣīran damīman*) (Iṣfahānī 9: 15)). Iṣfahānī confronts us with page after page of such mockery and expressions of derision toward Kuthayyir in "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi."

After learning of this seemingly incessant mobbing of Kuthayyir, however, we learn from the *akhbār* Iṣfahānī presents at the end of the chapter that nearly the entire city

attended his funeral despite it coinciding with the funeral of the famous early Quranic and *fiqh* scholar ʿIkrima. The people of the city flocked to mourn his death and celebrate his poetic legacy. In the final pages of the chapter, Iṣfahānī transforms him into a Christ-like figure and stages him as a celebrated poet of amorous verse and panegyrics. Indeed, his legend and verse were not only well-remembered during Iṣfahānī's time, but continue to be remembered and reimagined today.[129]

The positivist trend in scholarship on the *Aghānī*, as I have laid out in earlier chapters, approaches the text as an image of Umayyad and Abbasid society, wherein scholars foreclose analysis of such performative friction by taking them to be dismissible "inconsistencies," focusing instead on coherence and finality. Rather than dismissing the *akhbār* Iṣfahānī presents as "mere" contextualization, as Kilpatrick presumes (Kilpatrick, *Great Book* 89; "Modernity" 252), I deploy a hybrid of post-structuralist approaches, such as Bakhtin's theory of "dialogism" in order to open up analysis of the inclusion, arrangement, and curation of *akhbār*. I also draw again upon Deleuze and Guattari's "rhizomatic" theory to consider how Iṣfahānī's performance of lore in the *Aghānī*, in this case the lore of Kuthayyir, plugs into Umayyad culture and the Kuthayyir ʿAzza lore to form a rhizome with them and deterritorialize them. This performance also sets itself up to be plugged into the Abbasid social practices of Iṣfahānī's time, which are deterritorial-

[129] For examples, see al-Ṭayyib Ṣālih's *ʿUrs al-Zayn* and Carolyn Baugh's *The View from Garden City*.

ized by the same process and reterritorialized with the meaning reflected back onto it through the audience's participation.

This chapter explores how Iṣfahānī curates and presents overwhelmingly censorious *akhbār* about the stigmatized Kuthayyir in "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi," which culminates in the seemingly incongruous celebration of Kuthayyir at his funeral, in such a way that inspires sympathy in us as an audience, such that our reception of the chapter incorporates this incongruity. As I will show, Iṣfahānī's staging of a tragic mobbing and scapegoating of Kuthayyir invites us to confront our own horrific impulses to rush to judgment. Iṣfahānī's performance of the lore, in which Kuthayyir redeems himself by himself, urges us to asses our own inner demons.

RECEPTION AS KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN THE AGHĀNĪ

Reconsidering Akhbār Texts

Much of the scholarship that engages the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* tends to employ the text as a resource for fleshing out the historical or literary stories surrounding the people and events it stages.[130] While Hilary Kilpatrick's *Making the Great Book of Songs* seeks to treat the *Aghānī* as a work of literature in its own right and highlights Iṣfahānī's artfulness in compiling, arranging, and commenting on the *akhbār*, Kilpatrick argues that the historical reports contained in the *Aghānī* "merely serve to sketch the background and context in which the poems and settings were composed and performed" (*Great Book* 89). However, evidence both internal and external to the text suggest otherwise. Why, for

[130] See Khan and Khairallah

example, if the historical narratives "merely serve to sketch the background and context," as Kilpatrick argues, did Iṣfahānī make "conscious choices" ("Modernity" 252) in arranging the material?

The term "*akhbār* texts," refers to one of the earliest Arabic forms of narrative. Such texts, which include both prose and poetry, curate *akhbār*, i.e., lore or anecdotes. and belong to the larger category of *adab*. *Adab*, a key term in classical Arabic literature, includes, as Samer Ali argues, not only "a corpus of varied literary knowledge…that a littérateur must know" and "the constellation of courtly manners and tastes to be conditioned and exhibited," but also often-overlooked social dimensions of acquiring, producing, and performing that corpus of knowledge, manners, and tastes (*Salons* 33). A more profane narrative form, *akhbār* texts emerged as a common narrative strategy in the 9th and 10th centuries alongside the development of the religiously-oriented narrative form of *ḥadīth*. Whereas *ḥadīth* texts collect the words and sayings of or about the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions, *akhbār* texts include the words and sayings of and about poets, politicians, rulers, linguists, historians, religious figures and scholars, scientists, mathematicians, anonymous men and women, etc. Scholars and littérateurs employed the *akhbār* form to treat and present equally-varied types of *adab* knowledge, penning books of lore on animals, poets, humor, social gatherings, political histories, etc.[131]

[131] Examples include al-Jaḥiẓ's (d. 868) *Book of Animals* (*Kitāb al-Hayawān*), Ibn Qutayba's (d. 889) *Book of Poetry and Poets* (*Kitāb al-Shiʿr wa al-Shuʿarāʾ*), al-Jawzī's

Designating such particular categories for *akhbār* texts, however, often requires that we ignore the extent to which such types of *adab* knowledge overlap, despite a trend of specialization (Ouyang 11), as well as the diversity of approaches *adab* scholars and littérateurs took in organizing their books.[132] As such, attempts to arrange them into the-

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(d. 1201) *Book of Fools and Simpletons* (*Kitāb al-Ḥamqa wa-l-Mughaffalīn*), al-Tawḥīdī's (d. 1023) *Book of Entertainment and Conviviality* (*Kitāb al-Imtaʿ wa-l-Muʾanasa*), and al-Ṭabarī's (d. 923) *History of Prophets and Kings* (*Tarīkh al-Rusūl wa-l-Mulūk*).

[132] Considering those *akhbār* texts that relate the lore of poets serves to illustrate this diversity. In *Classes of the Master Poets* (*Ṭabaqāt Fuḥūl al-Shuʿarāʾ*), the critic and philologist Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī's (d. 845) dedicates each chapter to a particular "class" of poets, rather than individual poets, according to a particular method of classification inspired by Ibn Saʿd al-Baghdādi's (d. 845) *Book of the Major Classes* (*Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*) ("Criteria of Classification" 142), a collection of anecdotes about famous Islamic personalities. Ibn Qutayba's (d. 889) *Poetry and Poets* (*al-Shiʿr wa al-Shuʿarāʾ*) adopts a less complex criteria for organizing poets. Rather than organizing poets into classes, Ibn Qutayba dedicates each chapter of his anthology to one of approximately 100 poets, presenting them in chronological order. While Ibn Qutayba and Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī include poets that ranged from the pre-Islamic period (*Jāhiliyya*) to near contemporaries, the littérateur Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī's (d. 946) "Akhbār of the Poets" ("Akhbār al-Shuʿarāʾ") in his *Book of Folios* (*Kitāb al-Awrāq*) focuses on Abbasid poets, dedicating

matic categories for comparison tends to reduce the extent of the dialogism between such texts. With the penning of each *akhbār* text between the 9th and 11th centuries, authors of *akhbār* texts (*akhbāriyyīn*) offered innovations on and new possibilities for the conception, organization, and use of these texts. Among *akhbār* texts that relate poetic lore, we find a great diversity in text length, method of organization, definition of subject matter, and intertextual links with other types of *akhbār* and *adab* texts. While some of these *akhbār* texts take poetic personas as their organizing principle, others are organized around theme. While some are interested in classifications, others reveal a preoccupation with chronology or particular periods. Each *akhbārī* takes a novel approach to the collection and potential functions of *akhbār* from that of his peers and contemporaries, such that it is impossible to speak of a conventionalized *akhbār* tradition. Instead, the *akhbār* form was especially open to innovation and the practice of *adab*, and scholars employed the defining characteristic of the form, i.e., anecdotal reports (*akhbār*), for diverse effects.

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one or more sections to each of a total of twelve poets. The historian and philologist al-Raqīq al-Qayrawānī (d. 1026) also takes a particular focus in his book *The Axis of Pleasure in Descriptions of Wine* (*Quṭb al-Surūr fī Awsāf al-Khumūr*). However, he includes poets and poetry from the *Jāhiliyya* to the 11th century. In this anthology, al-Qayrawānī collects *akhbār* relating to wine and organizes chapters according to theme, such as "Rowdy Drunkenness" ("*al-ʿArbada*"), "Morning Drinking" ("*al-Sabūḥ*"), and "Drinking Alone" ("*al-Waḥda*"), as well as a chapter on wine poets in general.

The Rhizomatic Aghānī

Iṣfahānī's *Aghānī* can be taken as a particularly apt example of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the "rhizomatic" book. Such a book is made of "plateaus," a concept they borrow from Gregory Bateson's use of the word in his essay on Balinese culture and use to refer to "a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus* 24). As we have seen in the preceding chapters, the chapters of the *Aghānī* under study here, particularly as demonstrated for "The Lore of Majnun of the Banu Amir" ("Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir") and "The Narration of Qays bin Dharih" ("Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ") achieve "some sort of continuing plateau of intensity" without "[sexual] climax" or "a culmination point" (*Plateaus* 24). That is, the chapters of the *Aghānī* each build to a pitch of intensity yet thwart resolution.

Moreover, each plateau of a rhizomatic book "can be read starting anywhere and can be related to any other plateau" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus* 24). The non-linearity of Iṣfahānī's arrangement of *akhbār* within its chapters and his non-chronological nonhierarchical arrangement of these chapters allow a reception of the text without a necessary starting point or termination point. This is the kind of reception of the *Aghānī* that the Syrian poet Shafīq Jabrī (d. 1980) conveys in the introduction of his study of Iṣfahānī's text:

> I mention that I acquired this book thirty years ago and over the course of these thirty years, I would glance at some of its pages and perhaps read a page many times, then I would close the section and then come back to it after a week or a

month, returning to the same page or to a different page. I would stop at verses of poetry or one of the *akhbār*. Then I would close the section and come back to it after a week, a month, or a year, and devote (*aḥbis*) my mind entirely to a poem or a *khabar*. This is the way I passed thirty years, having not read the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* from its beginning to its end, having not read most of it or least of it, but having read pages from it. This form of reading did not pave a path for me to understand this book fully, but I knew nonetheless that it contained something of poetry and something of *akhbār* and nothing else, and that it was a book of great excellence (*kitāb jalīl al-qadar*).[133] (9)

Jabrī's articulation of his initial reading of the *Aghānī* over a period of thirty years reveals that he approached the book, finding multiple entryways and exits. Indeed, "multiple entryways" is, according to Deleuze and Guattari, "perhaps one of the most important

[133] Original text:

أذكر أني اقتنيت هذا الكتاب من ثلاثين سنة، وكنت في خلال هذه الثلاثين السنة أنظر في بعض ورقه نظرا، وربما قرأت الورقة الواحدة مرات كثيرة، ثم أطوي الجزء ثم أعود إليه بعد أسبوع أو بعد شهر فأرجع إلى الورقة نفسها، أو إلى ورقة غيرها، فأقف على أبيات من الشعر أو على خبر من الأخبار، ثم أطوي الجزء ثم أوعد إليه بعد أسبوع أو بعد شهر أو بعد سنة فأجس ذهني على شعر أو على خبر. وهكذا مرت علي ثلاثون سنة وأنا لم أقرأ كتاب الأغاني من أوله إلى آخره، ولا قرأت أكثره، ولا قرأت أقله، وإنما قرأت أوراقا منه، فلم تمهد لي قراءة من هذا الشكل سبيلا إلى الإحاطة بكتاب الأغاني، غير أني كنت أعلم أنه يشتمل على شيء من الشعر أو من الأخبار ليس إلا، وأنه كتاب جليل القدر.

characteristics of the rhizome" (*Plateaus* 2). "The burrow," they propose, "is an animal rhizome, and sometimes maintains a distinction between the line of flight as passageway and storage and living strata" (*Plateaus* 2). Jabrī approaches the *Aghānī* as such a burrow, entering and exiting at different places, moving through the text "as a passageway" at times, and "living" in certain lines of poetry and *akhbār* (*aqif ʿalā abyāt min al-shiʿr aw ʿalā khabar min al-akhbār*) at others, and "storing" his mind in the poetry and *akhbār* (*aḥbis dhihnī ʿalā shiʿr aw khabar*) at still others.

Each chapter, i.e., "plateau," of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* also lends itself to being approached "starting anywhere" and being "related to any other plateau" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus* 24) because the stories and poetry contained in the book straddle multiple plateaus and are cross-referential, communicating "with one another across microfissures" (*Plateaus* 12). That is, the characters and events in the *Aghānī* appear and reappear across chapters. Stories of Kuthayyir, for example, (re)appear in "The Origin and Lore of Jamīl" ("Nasab Jamīl wa Akhbāruhu") (Iṣfahānī vol. 8) in which new stories emerge and communicate with those in "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi" (Iṣfahānī vol. 9). We have also seen in Chapter 3 how the *Aghānī* chapters dedicated to Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir (Iṣfahānī vol. 2) and Qays bin Dharīḥ (Iṣfahānī vol. 9) communicate with one another through shared character and plot features.

Finally, the rhizome is conceived as a map (Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus* 13) and thus "has to do with performance" (14). As in performance, the *Aghānī* is not interested in discrete objects and subjects, but in processes, relations, and happenings. For example, in the case of "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir," we encounter madness as a process,

a transition rather than a particular state of mind. Similarly, as we shall see, the *Aghānī*'s interest in Kuthayyir is focused not on the character of an individual but on the processes through which his character is understood, his relations to others, and the events from which he emerges as a character. As a rhizomatic text, the Aghānī performs knowledge and poetry and invites the audience to be affected by that performance.

Openness in "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi"

A comparison of the treatment of our lover-poet Kuthayyir in the *Aghānī* to that in the Ibn Qutayba's (d. 889) *Kitāb al-Shiʿr wa al-Shuʿarāʾ*, which was composed almost a century prior, reveals the *Aghānī*'s distinctive use of *akhbār* can be received as destabilizing the notion of authoritative knowledge, decentering the author, and producing knowledge socially. Indeed, the rhizomatic book resists the urge to put down roots and instead requires the audience to do so. It is the audience's role, Daniel Smith notes in his essay on Deleuzian analytics, "to trace out trajectories whose directions are not given in advance of one's reading" (124). While we find knowledge presented as authoritative and resolved, i.e., rooted, in Ibn Qutayba's chapter on Kuthayyir, knowledge of Kuthayyir in the Aghānī "must be produced, constructed" (*Plateaus* 21).

Ibn Qutayba's text introduces Kuthayyir in the following way:

> He is Kuthayyir bin ʿAbd al-Raḥmān bin Abī Jumʿa from Khuzāʿa. He was a rebel (kān *rāfiḍiyyan*[134]) and he said when death came to him:

[134] The term *rāfiḍ* is also a pejorative term for a supported or the Alids or another anti-state cause.

I invoke by God to be free from both the son of Arwā[135]

and from the power of the Kharijites

And from ʿUmar I am free and from ʿAtīq[136]

once called the Prince of the Faithful[137] (313)

Not only does the entry about Kuthayyir in the *Kitāb al-Shiʿr wa al-Shuʿarāʾ* begin without a chain of transmission (*isnād*), it makes unqualified, univocal, authoritative claims about Kuthayyir's name, place of origin, and character.

In contrast, Kuthayyir's introduction in the *Aghānī* is immediately interrupted by *isnād* and includes an extensive staging of his lineage:

He is, according to what Muḥammad bin al-ʿAbbās al-Yazīdī told us was transmitted to him from Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb from Ibn al-ʿArābī, Abū Ṣakhr Kuthayyir bin ʿAbd al-Raḥmān bin al-Aswad bin ʿĀmir bin ʿUwaymir bin Makhlad bin Saʿīd bin Subayʿ bin Jaʿthima bin Saʿd bin Mulayḥ bin ʿAmrū, and he is Khuzāʿa bin Rabīʿa, and he is Yaḥyā bin Hāritha bin ʿAmrū, and he is Mazīqiyā bin ʿĀmir, and he is Māʾ al-Samāʾ bin Hāritha al-Ghatrīf bin Imriʾ al-Qays al-

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[135] ʿUthmān

[136] Abū Bakr

[137] Original text:

هو كثير بن عبد الرحمن بن أبي جمعة، من خزاعة، وكان رافضيا، وقال لما حضرته الوفاة:

بَرِئْتُ ِإلى الإلهِ مِن ابنِ أَرْوى وَمِن دينِ الخوارِجِ أَجْمَعَينا

وَمِن عُمَرٍ بَرْئِتُ وَمِن عَتيقٍ غَداةَ دُعِيَ أَميرَ المُؤمِنينا

Baṭrīq bin Thaʿlaba al-Bahlūl bin Māzin bin al-Azad, and he is Darʾ, and he was called Darāʾ Mamdūda bin al-Ghawth bin bint bin Mālik bin Zayd bin Kahlān bin Sabaʾ bin Yashjab bin Ya ʿrab bin Qahtān.

Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad bin Muḥammad bin Isḥāq al-Harmī told us that al-Zubayr bin Bakar told us that Abū Sakhr bin Abī al-Zaʿraʾ al-Khazaʿi told us that his mother Laylā bint Kuthayyir said: He is Kuthayyir bin ʿAbd al-Raḥmān bin al-Aswad ibn ʿĀmir bin Makhlad bin Subayʿ bin Saʿd bin Mulayḥ bin ʿAmrū bin Rabīʿa bin Hāritha bin ʿAmrū bin ʿĀmir.[138] (Iṣfahānī 9: 5)

Iṣfahānī provides two overwhelmingly lengthy appellations for Kuthayyir, both of which greatly exceed that which Ibn Qutayba provides. In addition to their overwhelming

[138] Original text:

هو فيما أخبرنا محمد بن العباس اليزيدي عن محمد بن حبيب عن ابن الأعرابي، أبو صخر كثير بن عبد الرحمن بن الأسود بن عامر بن عويمر بن مخلد بن سعيد بن سبيع بن جعثمة بن سعد بن مليح بن عمرو وهو خزاعة بن ربيعة وهو يحيى بن حارثة بن عمرو وهو مزيقيا بن عامر وهو ماء السماء بن حارثة الغطريف بن امرئ القيس البطريق بن ثعلبة البهلول بن مازن بن الأزد وهو درء وقيل دراء ممدودا بن الغوث بن نبت بن مالك بن زيد بن كهلان بن سبأ بن يشجب بن يعرب بن قحطان.

وأخبرنا أبو عبد الرحمن أحمد بن محمد بن إسحاق الحرمي قال حدثنا الزبير بن بكار قال حدثنا أبو صخر بن أبي الزعراء الخزاعي عن أمه ليلى بنت كثير قالت: هو كثير بن عبد الرحمن بن الأسود بن عامر بن مخلد بن سبيع بن سعد بن مليح بن عمرو بن ربيعة بن حارثة بن عمرو بن عامر. وأمه جمعة بنت الأشيم بن خالد بن عبيد بن مبشر بن رياح بن سيالة بن عامر بن جعثمة بن كعب بن عمرو بن ربيعة بن حارثة بن عمرو بن عامر.

length, these stagings of his genealogy defy easy comparison because of the stops and starts throughout the first of the two, creating a rhythm we do not find in the second, which, unlike the first, focuses on his mother's lineage in the second. These two *akhbār* do not diverge directly in the way we saw in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir." Rather, the audience might struggle to determine if there is any contradiction at all between these two names while nonetheless remaining quite aware of their difference. The question cannot be one of whether these *akhbār* agree or disagree or of their objective truth value but instead what we can do with them. They remain open and undetermined. Because the map, which is related to the rhizome, is "open and connectable in all of its dimensions," it is "susceptible to constant modification" and can be "adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus* 12). That is, it is through interactive processes that knowledge is produced in the *Aghānī*. Iṣfahānī's presentation of *akhbār* places the onus on the audience "to trace out trajectories" of unrealized potential directions (Smith 124).

"SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL"

Kuthayyir's poetry appears almost immediately in the *Kitāb al-Shiʿr wa al-Shuʿarāʾ* chapter on him, while the first citation of his poetry in the *Aghānī* is postponed by the stagings of his lineage discussed above and then a discussion of his place as a poet and the value of his poetry. This postponement places audiences in suspense, building our curiosity to judge his skill for ourselves and join the conversation. Six pages into "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi," the first provided line of Kuthayyir's verse inspires and

directs judgments about both his poetry and character. Embedded in a discussion of his appearance, the verse emerges as the narrative climax:

> Ibn Naṣr al-Muhallabī and Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Jawharī informed me that they had heard ʿUmar ibn Shabba transmit the following report from Isḥāq bin Ibrāhīm from al-Madāʿnī from al-Waqqāṣī: I saw Kuthayyir walking around (*yaṭūfu*) the house, so whoever told you that he exceeds the span of three hands in height, call him a liar. He was such that when he entered upon ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Marwān, he would tell him: Duck your head so the ceiling doesn't hit it. Al-Ḥarmī bin Abī al-ʿAlāʾ informed me that he heard al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār transmit the following from al-Madāʿnī and from Ibn Ḥabīb from his father from his grandfather from his father's grandfather ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, whose mother is Jumʿa bint Kuthayyir: Jarīr said to Kuthayyir: What a man you would be if not for your ugliness! Kuthayyir said:
>
> "If you are average among men, then for me,
>
> If I died, the space I'd leave behind would be as great as that of a tall man"[139] (Iṣfahānī 9: 9-10)

[139] Original text:

أخبرني حبيب بن نصر المهلبي وأحمد بن عبد العزيز الجوهري قالا حدثنا عمر بن شبة قال حدثني إسحاق بن إبراهيم عن المدائني عن الوقاصي قال: رأيت كثيرا يطوف في البيت، فمن حدثك أنه يزيد على ثلاثة أشبار فكذبه؛ وكان إذا دخل على عبد العزيز بن مروان يقول: طأطئ رأسك لا يصيبه السقف.

The notion of Kuthayyir's ugliness and short stature materializes from these two anecdotes, each of which is introduced by a presentation of the social channels (both the chain of transmission (*isnād*) and the dialogue of the report (*matn*)) through which they travelled and dramatize the social meaning and implications of his appearance.

In the first anecdote, al-Waqqāṣī reports that having seen Kuthayyir walking around (*yaṭūf*) the house, anyone who claims that he is taller than three hands should be accused of being a liar (*kadhdhibhu*). The verb used to refer to Kuthayyir's hanging about his house, i.e., *yaṭūf*, and the directive to call someone else a liar both bring to mind religious associations. First, as *yaṭūf* might also be rendered in English as "to circumambulate" and specifically to circumambulate the Kaʿba during pilgrimage (Lane 1892, Wehr 671), its use in this anecdote offers a profane reenactment of this pious act. That is, al-Waqqāṣī uses sacred imagery, i.e., circumambulating the Kaʿba to reference the mundane, i.e., Kuthayyir wandering around his house. Likewise, al-Waqqāṣī's jocular dictum trivializes the religiously-charged act of calling someone a liar (*al-takdhīb*), an act associated with the direct denial of the divine revelation and which al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) would proclaim a century after Iṣfahānī curated his *Aghānī* was the "primary precondi-

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أخبرني الحرمي بن أبي العلاء قال حدثنا الزبير بن بكار قال حدثني إسحاق بن إبراهيم عن المدائني، وعن ابن حبيب عن أبيه عن جده عن جد أبيه عبد العزيز وأمه جمعة بنت كثير قال: قال جرير لكثير: أي رجل أنت لولا دمامتك فقال كثير:

إنْ أكَ قَصْدًا في الرِجالِ فإنني إذا حَلَّ أَمْرٌ ساحَتي لِطَـويلُ

tion" for accusing someone of being an infidel (*al-takfīr*) (Mitha 69). Al-Waqqāṣī commands that anyone who says Kuthayyir is taller than three hand-spans (*thalātha ashbār*) be called a liar, and three hands, according the Maliki, Hanafi, and Hanbali schools of jurisprudence, would amount to 27cm, 35cm, and 46cm, respectively (Muhammad 52). Al-Waqqāṣī's dictum, then, implies that Kuthayyir stood no taller than a foot and a half, thus purposely exaggerating Kuthayyir's small stature to the point of absurdity. The religious diction of *takdhīr* contrasts with this attempt at humor in his dictum, which suggests that whoever implies that this religiously-charged and self-conscious lie is a lie is themselves a liar, and calls al-Waqqāṣī's credibility as a narrator is called into question. After this tongue-in-cheek mocking, we find a similar playfulness in what al-Waqqāṣī reports the Umayyad governor of Egypt and son of Caliph Marwān I, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Marwān (d. 705), would say when Kuthayyir came to his door: "Duck your head so the ceiling doesn't hit it" (Iṣfahānī 9: 9). Even political weights such as ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, this anecdote suggests, could not resist Kuthayyir's mockability, which again in this instance centers around his short stature. Like the irony of al-Waqqāṣī's dictum, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's sarcastic remark flouts any need for "sincerity."

The next *khabar* relate another instance in which Kuthayyir is mocked for his shortness. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, Kuthayyir's grandson, reports an incident in which the satirical poet Jarīr (d. 728) makes a jab at Kuthayyir: "What a man you would be if not for your ugliness!" (Iṣfahānī 9: 10). Kuthayyir responds in verse, the first verse of his that we encounter in "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi,": "If I am average among men, then some matter comes to me, I am tall." (9: 10). As Kuthayyir's response seems to presume,

the ugliness (*al-damāma*) to which Jarīr refers stems from his shortness, as it is an ugliness that is "not pleasing to the eyes" in such a way that "relates to the stature" (Lane 911). In the poetic response Iṣfahānī presents here, Kuthayyir offers a defense of his importance as a man despite his height without lobbing an insult back at his fellow poet. This poetic defense resonates with Kuthayyir's name, which is a diminutive of *kathīr* (many, a lot). As Arabic diminutives can indicate a sense of endearment, insult, smallness, or intensity, we can read *kuthayyir* as both an endearing and insulting term, an allusion to his short statue, and his intensity. As Kuthayyir suggests in this verse, he is a lot in a small package, an embodiment of a paradox we come to accept, and indeed, we learn throughout this chapter of the *Aghānī* that nothing is as it first appears to be.

Up until this point, the *akhbār* have only taken up his lineage and status as a poet; no character flaws have surfaced—yet. Instead, this first discussion of Kuthayyir as a character focuses on his shortness and presents it as a physical flaw upon which the mockery he endured was centered. Furthermore, the mockery we encounter reveals the disingenuousness of some of his ridiculers and emphasizes the positive view of others toward him as a man and poet, despite the insults about his appearance. As I have mentioned to earlier, the majority of the *akhbār* that Iṣfahānī includes in "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi" will stage Kuthayyir as disingenuous and inconsiderate. With that in mind, it is striking that the first lines of poetry we encounter follow anecdotes of others behaving disingenuously and inconsiderately toward Kuthayyir. We encounter his poetry, then, as a defensive yet inoffensive response to the mocking and teasing he is subject to as a result of his physical appearance and thus are primed to be sensitive to

Kuthayyir's presentation of his subjectivity in his poetry. As the victim of mockery based on physical flaws, the character of Kuthayyir elicits some audience sympathy. Furthermore, this mocking casts doubt upon the "sincerity" and considerateness of the narrators themselves and those who we will later encounter charging Kuthayyir with being a liar.

The polyvocality of Kuthayyir's first verse as cited above emerges from the accompanying anecdotes and the *isnād*. Rather than serving as mere contextualization or background, the *isnād* and anecdote, together with the verse, form a compound narrative that can be viewed in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, in which the power of the text originates in the coexistence of and conflict with different types of speech: the speech of Iṣfahānī, the speech of the narrators, and the speech of the characters. As Bakhtin contends, such heteroglossic texts imply a "contradictory environment of alien words" that is present to the speaker "in the consciousness of the listener, as his apperceptive background, pregnant with responses and objections" (*Dialogic Imagination* 281). The invective and sarcasm in these anecdotes, along with the cacophony of voices around them, provoke the audience's responses and objections, adding its many voices to the text to participate in the production of knowledge in the text.

The extensive use of *isnād* and absence of Iṣfahānī's direct narrative voice challenges the concept of authoritative knowledge and contrast with Ibn Qutayba's limited use of *isnād* and immediate authoritative interference. Authorial aims in the *Aghānī* are, as Bakhtin argues for the case of the novel, "refracted" through "another's speech in another's language" (*Dialogic Imagination* 324). Knowledge is produced not through an authoritative figure nor through communal consensus, but through communal practices

that place a premium on artful, performative renderings of people and events, mirroring the ways in which literary salons (*mujālasāt*) of the time "enabled people...to inherit, borrow, adjust, and share cultural knowledge" (Ali, *Salons* 13-14). The acknowledgement that knowledge, or "truth," is socially constructed is commonplace today. What we sense from the *Aghānī*, as well as the *mujālasāt*, however, is not merely an awareness of the social construction of knowledge behind the scenes, but an enactment of it as an implicit reality. In other words, by consistently staging knowledge in its social context in "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi," Iṣfahānī, we might sense, suggests to his audience that the significance of a particular piece of knowledge is bound to the social contexts and setting from which that knowledge emerges and is performed, reinforced, and morphed.

JUDGES BECOMING THE JUDGED

In responding to Deleuze and Guattari's call to experiment with what the literary machine can do with other machines, we can plug the *Aghānī* into the tenth century humanism machine to appreciate its ability to inspire sympathy for Kuthayyir by staging his faults within the social context and directing skepticism not towards Kuthayyir but towards his critics. Kuthayyir's poetry and transgressive behavior first raised eyebrows during the Umayyad Era (661-750), a period of critical transition and transformation for Arabic society. Urban migration and the consequent clash between the Bedouin and Islamic social orders that characterized the period raised social concerns and anxieties about adapting social mores and attitudes (Jayyusi 389). As Kuthayyir is for the audience a historical, literary figure and not a contemporary with whom they must interact, the motiva-

tion to join in the mocking of Kuthayyir is replaced by a desire to scorn his unenlightened contemporaries of Umayyad society.

Iṣfahānī composed his retelling of the legend two centuries after the Kuthayyir ʿAzza story first emerged, at a time when Arabo-Islamic society was witnessing another crucial period of transition and transformation. The Abbasids, who had removed the Umayyads from power in the mid-eighth century, had been ruling most of the Islamicate realm for two centuries, but the disintegration of this power began almost as soon as it was established (Hodgson, *Venture* 233). By the mid-ninth century, the Abbasids were losing control over their vast empire, and the tenth century witnessed the breakup of the caliphate, which gave way to a number of successor states (Hodgson, *Venture* 493). Samer Ali argues that the murder of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil in 861 marked a particularly traumatic moment for Abbasid society, one that generated "new ideals of decentralized governance, egalitarianism, and social mobility" and "a concern for the human subject, individualism, and foreign cultures" (*Salons* 5, 195). Such new ideals meant a new social code was in order and, thus, renewed anxieties about defining and determining acceptable behaviors. It is in this context that Iṣfahānī's novel reimagination of the Kuthayyir ʿAzza legend emerged and addressed concerns about acceptable behavior while reflecting in its approach to these concerns the philosophical shift towards skepticism and the destabilization of knowledge.

As we have seen with "The Narration and Lore of Dhu l'Rumma" ("Dhikr Dhī ʾl-Rumma wa Khabarihi"), the ambivalence of Kuthayyir's contemporaries toward him, as presented in the *Aghānī*, resonates with the anxieties that emerged from the changes with-

in the social order of both the 7/8th centuries and the 10th century. The primary objection to Kuthayyir that the *akhbār* report is his behavior, which tends to thwart social conventions and expectations. For example, Iṣfahānī's version of the Kuthayyir legend includes a story in which an unnamed man from the Banū Muzayna tribe criticizes Kuthayyir for not praying at the proper time:

> He said: I spent one evening with Kuthayyir as a guest at his place. We talked a bit and slept. When dawn came, he was writhing in pain. I got up and performed ablutions and prayed while Kuthayyir was sleeping under his blanket. When the first rays of the sun rose, he writhed in pain and said: "Maid, bring me some water." He said: I said, "Damn you for the rest of the day! Or at least for this hour!" I mounted my camel and left him behind.[140] (Iṣfahānī 9: 27)

Disturbed by Kuthayyir's nonobservance of the dawn prayer, and perhaps also by his apparent hangover, our anonymous Muzayni narrator leaves him writhing in pain and curses him as he rides away in apparent in indignation. It is likely that Iṣfahānī's audience may have recognized their own concerns with proper behavior in those of Kuthayyir's contemporaries, but within the widened perspective, this story also invites a critical look

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[140] Original text:

قال: ضفت كثيرا ليلة وبت عنده ثم تحدثنا ونمنا. فلما طلع الفجر تضور، ثم قمت فتوضأت وصليت وكثير راقد في لحافه. فلما طلع قرن الشمس تضور ثم قال: يا جارية اسجري لي ماء. قال قلت: تبا لك سائر اليوم أو هذه الساعة هذا وركبت راحلتي وتركته.

at Kuthayyir's displeased and ungracious houseguest, who appears sanctimonious. Indeed, it is not only Kuthayyir that the *Aghānī* examines; the judgments about him and those that issue them are also available for critique. Considering the vehemence of the scapegoating to which Kuthayyir is subjected, the audience is called upon to show mercy, understanding, and generosity. "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi" does not offer a definitive assessment of Kuthayyir's character. While it reports the claims of others regarding his character, the audience is left to make its own judgment based on a variety of *akhbār* that stage his interactions with others. The audience's knowledge of Kuthayyir is socially produced on every level; knowledge is presented as narratives of Kuthayyir's social interactions, which are themselves traded at social gatherings, and the *Aghānī* invites its audience to make judgments based on these *akhbār*.

Furthermore, the presentation of knowledge of Kuthayyir in the *Aghānī* suggests an interest not only with who Kuthayyir was and what poetry he composed, but also about his behaviors and interactions. As we have seen, the first verse attributed to Kuthayyir in this chapter is a single line that foregrounds the way in which he responds to mockery. The preceding section, which builds suspense around Kuthayyir's poetry, celebrates his superior ability in composing panegyrics. While the verse that follows does not constitute praise poetry per se, it demonstrates an ability to reframe criticism and turn it on its head. Moreover, as the criticism prompting the poetic response in this case is personally directed, this organization suggests that poetic ability is tied in with social experiences and frames Kuthayyir as a victim rather than a villain.

The performative texture of this chapter in the *Aghānī* and the relevance of Kuthayyir's interactions with others are further evidenced by the numerous anecdotes unaccompanied by verse. In one such anecdote, Kuthayyir is portrayed as lacking the proper reverence toward patriarchal authority:

> Al-Ḥaramī informed us that al-Zubayr reported to him what his father told him: Kuthayyir was disobedient (*ʿāqq*) to his father. One of his father's fingers became injured. Kuthayyir said to him: Do you know why your finger was injured? He said: I don't know. He said: Because you raise it to God when making a false oath (*fī yamīnin kādhibin*).[141] (Iṣfahānī 9: 26)

Historian and genealogist al-Zubayr bin Bakkar (d. 870) reports this story, which he heard from his father, to al-Ḥaramī, and Iṣfahānī relates it to the audience. In this story, Kuthayyir accuses his father not merely of lying but of making false oaths. Kuthayyir's accusation of improper conduct becomes the basis for the narrator, al-Zubayr's father, to send an accusation his way. He accuses the accuser himself of improper conduct, explicitly charging Kuthayyir with paternal disobedience. Both accusations have religious dimensions; for example, making false oaths and parental disobedience make up two of the

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[141] Original text:

أخبرنا الحرمي قال حدثنا الزبير قال حدثني أبي قال: كان كثير عاقا لأبيه ، وكان أبوه قد أصابته قرحة في إصبع من أصابع يده. فقال له كثير: أتدري لم أصابتك هذه القرحة في إصبعك؟ قال: لا أدري قال: مما ترفعها إلى الله في يمين كاذبة.

four heinous crimes (*kabāʾir*) that the Prophet Muhammad cites in a *ḥadīth* recorded in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*: "Among the heinous crimes are idolatry, parental disobedience (*ʿuqūq al-wālidayni*), suicide, and false oaths" (al-Bukhārī 1653). By explicitly framing Kuthayyir's accusation of a heinous crime as a heinous crime itself, the anecdote transfers the judgment from Kuthayyir's father onto Kuthayyir. In turn, by framing Kuthayyir's story as a series of linked accusations and judgments, "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi" invites the audience to transform the judge into the judged. This transfer of judgment, however, transcends the common edict against judging others lest one be judged. That is, this unending game of accusations suggests the absurdity of the inherent paradox of this edict, which itself becomes the ground for judgments.

Another episode, also in the form of a transmitted report without accompanying verse, suggests an indirect accusation against Kuthayyir's tendency for disingenuousness and to violate implied proper behavior:

> Kuthayyir would visit one of his aunts, who was an older, virtuous woman. She would show him regard (*tukrimuhu*) and offer him a pillow to sit on. He said to her one day: No, by God, you do not know me and you do not show me (*lā tukrimunī haqq karāmatī*) the proper regard! She said: Indeed, by God, I know you. He said: So, who am I? She said: You are the son of so-and-so and so-and-so, and she began praising his father and mother. He said: Now I know that you don't

know me. She said: So, who are you? He said: I am Jonah (*yūnus ibn Matta*).[142] (Iṣfahānī 9: 26)

This episode stages an enactment of Kuthayyir's unorthodox religious beliefs in order to call their "sincerity" into question. Here, the scholar Ibn Da'b (d. 787) reports that Kuthayyir would unfairly accuse his "older, virtuous" (*barza*) aunt of not showing him proper regard, as he is the reincarnation of Jonah. The narrator says his aunt shows him proper regard; Kuthayyir says she does not. Both the narrator and his aunt say he is her brother's son; Kuthayyir says he is not. Not only does Kuthayyir reject what the narrator and his aunt present as reality, he does so in a way that transgresses accepted religious beliefs by claiming to be Jonah. Without directly stating it, this anecdote dramatizes both senses of the descriptor Ibn Qutayba uses for Kuthayyir in his *Book of Poetry and Poets* (*Kitāb al-Shiʿr wa al-Shuʿarāʾ*). This descriptor, *rāfiḍ*, denotes both one who rejects and a religious heretic. Rather than describing him as a *rāfiḍ*, however, this anecdote, as much of the other anecdotes in "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi," presents this accusation to the audience as a performance. The audience does not simply receive this

[142] Original text:

كان كثير يدخل على عمة له برزة فتكرمه وتطرح له وسادة يجلس عليها. قال لها يوما: لا والله ما تعرفينني ولا تكرمينني حق كرامتي قالت: بلى والله إني لأعرفك. فقال: فمن أنا؟ قالت: ابن فلان وابن فلانة، وجعلت تمدح أباه وأمه. فقال: قد عرفت أنك لا تعرفينني. قالت: فمن أنت؟ قال: أنا يونس بن متى.

knowledge of Kuthayyir, then, but is invited to consider Kuthayyir as a more complex character.

Furthermore, the two reports cited above, which appear in direct succession in "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi" read like setups to jokes with punchlines delivered by Kuthayyir: "Because you raise it to God when making a false oath," and "I am Jonah (*yūnus ibn matta*)." While it appears the narrators of each of these anecdotes aim to expose Kuthayyir's idiocy and lack of respect for family and social boundaries, the brevity, disapproval, and finality of these reports expose these mean-spiritedness of these aims and the focus is transferred from Kuthayyir onto those who mock and criticize him without losing their comic dimension.

THE SUBJECTIVITY OF "SINCERITY"

Perhaps the most prominent concern expressed about Kuthayyir in the *Aghānī* is in regard to his "sincerity" or lack thereof in his professed love for ʿAzza. Two *akhbār* narrate the first encounter between Kuthayyir and ʿAzza in very ways. The first is preceded by a sort of disclaimer presented through Iṣfahānī's direct narrative voice, which also intervenes here to add an unmediated introduction that uses the passive voice, avoiding authoritative claims about Kuthayyir himself. It begins as follows:

> An abundance of amatory verses for ʿAzza al-Ḍamriya has been attributed to Kuthayyir. He is known through her, so he is called Kuthayyir ʿAzza. She is ʿAzza bint Ḥumayl ibn Waqqāṣ. Al-Ḥaramī bin Abū al-ʿAlāʿ informed me that he heard al-Zubayr transmit the following report from Muḥammad bin al-Ḥasan:

> Abū Baṣra al-ʿIfārī al-Muḥaddath, who is called Ḥumayl bin Waqqāṣ, is the father of ʿAzza, whom Kuthayyir mentions in erotic verses. The beginning of his passionate love for her was—despite that it is said: he was lying about that and was never in love, and that is mentioned after his story with her—according to what al-Ḥaramī told me, saying: Zubayr bin Bakkār said ʿAbdallah bin Ibrāhīm al-Saʿdī told me Ibrāhīm Ibn Yaʿqūb Ibn Jamīʿ al-Khazāʿī said:
>
> The beginning of Kuthayyir's passionate love for ʿAzza was when he passed by some women from Banū Ḍamra and he had with him some sheep…[143] (Iṣfahānī 9: 32-33)

This layered *khabar* opens with a passive statement that precedes any *isnād*: "An abundance of amatory verses for ʿAzza al-Ḍamriya has been attributed to Kuthayyir" (9: 32). Iṣfahānī presents Kuthayyir's poetry for ʿAzza not as poetry he necessarily composed but as poetry attributed to him, casting some doubt at least upon the notion that he actually

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[143] Original text:

ونسب كثير لكثرة تشبيبه بعزة الضمرية إليها، وعرف بها فقيل كثير عزة. وهي عزة بنت حميل بن وقاص. أخبرني الحرمى بن أبى العلاء قال حدّثني الزبير قال حدثني محمد بن الحسن قال:

أبو بصرة الغفاري المحدث واسمه حميل بن وقاص هو أبو عزة التي كان ينسب بها كثير. وكان ابتداء عشقه إياها على أنه قد قيل: إنه كان في ذلك كاذبا ولم يكن بعاشق، وذلك يذكر بعد خبره معها فيما أخبرني به الحرمي قال حدثنا الزبير بن بكار قال حدثني عبد الله بن إبراهيم السعدي قال حدثني إبراهيم بن يعقوب بن جميع الخزاعي: أنه كان أول عشق كثيرعزة أن كثيرا مر بنسوة من بني ضمرة ومعه جلب غنم…

composed these amatory verses. Then, after presenting some *isnād*, Iṣfahānī chimes in again after beginning to relate the report: "The beginning of his passionate love for her was—despite that it is said: he was lying about that and was never in love, and that is mentioned after his story with her—according to what al-Ḥaramī told me, saying…" (9: 32-33). The doubt cast by the opening statement of this section of "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi" builds here to frame the story of Kuthayyir's falling in love with ʿAzza as one that is to be looked upon with skepticism and scrutiny.

This *khabar* continues to tell the story of the beginning of Kuthayyir's falling in love with ʿAzza. We learn that these women from the Banū Ḍamra sent the young ʿAzza to ask Kuthayyir to sell them one of his sheep and to take the payment for it from them when he finished his rounds. He became smitten with ʿAzza, we are told, and gave her the sheep. When he returned, one of the women approached him with the money for the sheep, saying he would only take the money from the person to whom he gave the sheep, which occasions the line of verse:

> Everyone who has a debt has paid and fulfilled his duty to his creditor
>
> But as ʿAzza has delayed payment, she has held her creditor captive.[144] (9: 33)

[144] Original text:

قال: لا آخذ دراهمي إلا ممن دفعت الكبش إليها. وخرج وهو يقول:

قَضَى كُلُّ ذي دَينٍ فَوَفَّى غَريمَهُ وَعَزَّةُ مَمَطولٌ مُعَنًّى غَريمُها

This first version of this tale of the beginning then ends with the line: "He said: such was his first meeting with her" (Iṣfahānī 9: 33).

The second version of the story follows in the next *khabar*. The opening of the second version offers a more detail than the first but the plot is quite consistent. The two versions diverge with regard to who approached whom initially. In the first, it is the women, through ʿAzza, who approach Kuthayyir, and in the second, it is Kuthayyir who approach the women. While the first version ends with the aforementioned line of poetry, the second includes more verse and then continues the tale further:

> He continued on his way. Then he returned to them when he had sold off his flock and recited:
>
> I looked at her intensely when she was a young girl
>
> Over time she matured and her breasts appeared
>
> They had put her in a shift while she was in her young girl's chemisette
>
> When girls her age were not yet wearing shifts
>
> Among the modest women, the young beauty's companion desired her
>
> When the playful banter doesn't expire as long as you keep it up
>
> A song mentioned after the completion of this khabar in included with this line and others because it is of the same type. So he also sang to them:
>
> Everyone who has a debt has paid and fulfilled his duty to his creditor
>
> But as ʿAzza has delayed payment, she has held her creditor captive[145]

[145] Original text:

So they said to him: You refuse all but ʿAzza. So they brought her to him and she was quite reluctant. After that ʿAzza fell in love with him more intensely than he loved her.

Al-Zubayr said: I asked Muḥammad Ibn Abū Bakar bin ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz bin ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Khazāʿī known was Abū Jandal about this conversation. He knew about it from his father from his grandfather ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Ibn Abū Jandal from his mother Jumʿa bint Kuthayyir from her father.[146] (Iṣfahānī 9: 34-35)

Not inconsistent with the first version, this version includes more verse and detail. Furthermore, rather than ending with Kuthayyir's verse about ʿAzza's debt to him, which suggests his smittenness, this *khabar* adds that the women complied with his request and

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ومضى لوجهه، ثم رجع إليهن حين فرغ من بيع جلبه فأنشدهن فيها:

نظرت إليها نظرة وهي عاتق　　على حين أن شبت وبان نهودها

وقد درعوها وهي ذات مؤصد　　مجوب ولما يلبس الدرع ريدها

من الخفرات البيض ود جليسها　　إذا ما انقضت أحدوثة لو تعيدها

في هذا البيت وأبيات أخر معه غناء يذكر بعد تمام هذا الخبر وما يضاف إليه من جنسه. وأنشدهن أيضا:

قضى كل ذي دين فوفى غريمه　　وعزة ممطول معنى غريمها

[146] Original text:

فقلن له: أبيت إلا عزة وأبرزنها إليه وهي كارهة. ثم أحبته عزة بعد ذلك أشد من حبه إياها.

قال الزبير: فسألت محمد بن أبي بكر بن عبد العزيز بن عبد الرحمن الخزاعي المعروف بأبي جندل عن هذا الحديث، فعرفه وحدثنيه عن أبيه عن جده عبد العزيز بن أبي جندل عن أمه جمعة بنت كثير عن أبيها.

brought the reluctant ʿAzza to him, causing her to fall more deeply in love with him than he was with her. This new ending of their first meeting suggests a new meaning of this origin story and calls into question once again Kuthayyir's love for ʿAzza. Iṣfahānī then concludes this *khabar* with another set of isnād that lend support to the story of Kuthayyir falling in love with ʿAzza.

Considering these two *akhbār* together, we find that they each strike a balance between affirming and denying Kuthayyir's "sincerity" in his professed love for ʿAzza. The first story itself casts no doubt, but it is introduced by a chain of *isnād* that raises skepticism. Meanwhile, the second story relates that it was ʿAzza's love for Kuthayyir was greater than his love for her, casting some doubt on Kuthayyir's "sincerity." However, this story, which includes Kuthayyir's amatory verse for ʿAzza, is reinforced by its consistency with the first story as well as by the final *isnād* that provides support for the story's authority. The way the *isnād* and *khabar* interact with one another in "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi" achieves a delicate tension between affirming and denying. It is not the stark contrast of performative friction in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir" that we find here, but rather a more subtle balancing act between doubt and certainty. What begins to emerge from the *akhbār* of this chapter of the *Aghānī* is a sense that skepticism should not take the form of affirming or denying a proposed truth but rather it should take the form of a continuous process of questioning of both affirmations and denials. Rather than encouraging a reactionary nihilism or seeking refuge in dogmatism in response to the fear of disingenuousness or trickery, Iṣfahānī's treatment of the doubts

surrounding Kuthayyir's "sincerity" embraces the possibility of deception as a force that constantly counterbalances the tyranny of authoritative knowledge.

These anecdotes are followed by a *khabar* accompanied a lengthy *isnād* that narrates an encounter between an aging ʿAzza and the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 705) in which the caliph questions ʿAzza about the reason for Kuthayyir's love for her, suggesting some incredulity based on her physical appearance at the time:

> ʿAzza dropped in on ʿAbd al-Malik bin Marwān, and she had grown old. He said to her: You are ʿAzza Kuthayyir. She said: I am ʿAzza bint Ḥumayl. He said: You are the one for whom Kuthayyir said: "ʿAzza has a fire that never dies out / Like a star when looking upon her from afar." So what is it that he admired so much in you (*mā alladhī aʿjabahu minki*)? She said: Not at all, Prince of the Believers! By God, I was at that time better than fire on a cold night. According to what Muḥammad bin Ṣāliḥ al-Aslamī said: She said to him: What he admired in me is what the Muslims admired in you when they made you caliph. He said: He had black teeth that he would hide, so when he laughed, they appeared. She said to him: That's what I wanted to show.[147] (Iṣfahānī 9: 35-36)

[147] Original text:

دخلت عزة على عبد الملك بن مروان وقد عجزت، فقال لها أنت عزة كثير فقالت: أبا عزة بنت حميل. قال: أنت التي يقول لك كثير:

لعزة نار ما تبوخ كأنها إذا ما رمقناها من البعد كوكب

In this anecdote, each of ʿAzza's responses to the caliph's questions neither affirms nor denies Kuthayyir's "sincerity." Instead, in each, she ignores the implied insult and incredulity of the caliph. When asked if she is ʿAzza Kuthayyir, or, the ʿAzza of Kuthayyir, an inversion of the usual possessive construction used to refer to ʿudhri poets, she simply responds by stating that she is ʿAzza, daughter of Ḥumayl. In her next response, she rejects the specific lines the caliph recites, declaring that this flattering line barely does her then fire-like presence justice. Her last response turns the question back onto the caliph and calls upon him to consider what made him apparently so appealing to Muslims such that would legitimate his appointed position.

ʿAbd al-Malik's curiosity about what it was that drew Kuthayyir to ʿAzza seems to stem from a desire to embarrass her by insulting her appearance, while also suggesting his incredulity that Kuthayyir could have been as deeply in love with her as his poetry would suggest. Rather than expressing concern for such doubts, ʿAzza plays off of the caliph's insecurity about his own appearance and admirability. Her response suggests that the belief that one is loved, whether as a romantic beloved or as a beloved leader, requires vulnerability. By raising the question of what it was that the Muslims found so admirable in him, she makes the caliph laugh, revealing the black teeth he sought to hide.

فما الذي أعجبه منك؟ قالت: كلا يا أمير المؤمنين فوالله لقد كنت في عهده أحسن من النار في الليلة القرة. وفي حديث محمد بن صالح الأسلمي: فقالت له: أعجبه مني ما أعجب المسلمين منك حين صيروك خليفة. قال: وكانت له سن سوداء يخفيها، فضحك حتى بدت. فقالت له: هذا الذي أردت أن أبديه.

Rather than simply reinforcing or complicating doubts about Kuthayyir's "sincerity" or the truth behind the Kuthayyir ʿAzza love story, this *khabar* calls upon the audience to reconsider the function of concerns about "sincerity" and disingenuousness. The character of Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik appears in this *khabar*, as in other *akhbār* in this chapter, as we will see, to pose questions to a central characters of the story, engaging with the story as a representative of its audience. That is, his questions seek not simply to find out what happened but how the characters felt about what happened. Rather than revealing ʿAzza's subjective experience through these questions, he realizes his own subjectivity. The questions he poses and the answers he receives in this *khabar* reveal more about his own insecurities and vulnerabilities, than they do ʿAzza's. As the caliph's role in this story is much like that of an audience representative, the audience is likewise called upon to consider their own insecurities and vulnerabilities. In realizing our subjectivity and the caliph his, the notion of "sincerity" loses its clarity. That is, judging love and being loved, which emerge as subjective experiences here, as either sincere or insincere becomes untenable. Once again, the lens of "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi" draws away from the central character of Kuthayyir, toward the narrator, and finally lands upon the audience.

Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik appears again in a later report of "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi." In it, it is Kuthayyir who the caliph approaches with a question. This time he asks about "the most wondrous (*aʿjab*) *khabar* of his with ʿAzza" (Iṣfahānī 9: 37). Kuthayyir responds by narrating their encounter when traveling for Ḥajj (9: 37-39). According to Kuthayyir's account, during the journey, ʿAzza went from tent to tent, having

been sent out to buy butter by her husband, to whom she was wed shortly after her first encounter with Kuthayyir (9: 38). Without realizing it, ʿAzza entered Kuthayyir's tent where he had been sharpening an arrow. As if in a trance, he looked at her and continued to sharpen until he cut through to his bone and began bleeding (9: 38). ʿAzza used her robe to wipe the blood away and Kuthayyir sent her back with butter for her husband. When her husband saw the blood, he forced her to relate what had happened (9: 38). After learning about the incident, he struck her and forced her to curse Kuthayyir to his face:

> She approached me and her husband was with her. She said to me, crying: you son of a whore. Then, they left. That is when I said:
>
> The pig made her curse me and I liked how she did it
>
> But for her owner she humiliated herself. (Iṣfahānī 9: 38)[148]

A section of song from this poem:

> My two friends, this is ʿAzza's abode, so bind the legs
>
> Of your young she-camels and cry where she has settled down
>
> Before ʿAzza, I hadn't known what weeping was

[148] Original text:

فوقفت علي وهو معها فقالت لي: يا بن الزانية وهي تبكي، ثم انصرفا. فذلك حين أقول:

يُكَلِّفُها الخِنْزيرُ شَتْمِي وَما بِها * هَواني ولكنّ للمَليك اِسْتَذَلَّتِ

نسبة ما في هذه القصيدة من الغناء

Nor did I know pangs of the heart until she took control of me

If only my camel had been tied up at ʿAzza's

With weak rope such that it could have separated from it and gone astray

Her luggage found a home with the settled people

And she had a jealous tyrant other than me, so she went astray

I said to her: ʿAzz, every misfortune,

If the soul finds a home in it one day, it becomes weak

Treat us poorly or treat us well, for us,

she is neither blameworthy nor hated when she is hateful

I am satiated and satisfied, not sick or intoxicated

about ʿAzza, because from our symptoms she took pleasure

I desired her to the extent that when I saw her

I saw my desires as paths that had drawn near.

As if I was calling out to a rock when she rejected me,

Like a slippery stone, upon which even the most agile would slip

Merciful you are and she who has come upon you is nothing but a cold woman;

Whoever can't handle this way of hers, she abandons.

Ruin befalls he who wants ruin for you

Those women who said ʿAzza went mad went mad themselves[149]

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[149] Original text:

خَليلَيَّ هَذا رَسْمُ عَزَّةِ فاعْقَلا قَلوصَيْكُما ثم ابْكَيا حَيثُ حَلَّتِ

(Iṣfahānī 9: 38-39)

The story, narrated by Kuthayyir, and the lines of his love-complaint poetry (*nasīb*) foreground his subjectivity. After Kuthayyir unintentionally cuts through his bone and draws his own blood, he stains ʿAzza with it, who returns to unwillingly draw blood through insult. The word used for blood (*damm*) shares its root with the word used earlier to stage Kuthayyir's ugliness (*damāmah*), and thus recalls the early insults that centered around his ugliness and presented him as a sympathetic victim.

Then, staged as a response to ʿAzza's forced insult, Kuthayyir's poetry presents his subjective experience of loving ʿAzza. The audience encounters Kuthayyir's subjectivity without direct mediation for the first time in the text, and the question of "sincerity" is transferred from seeking to determine Kuthayyir's "sincerity" to assessing his ability to

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وَما كُنْتُ أَدْرِي قَبْلَ عَزَّةِ ما البِكا وَلا موجعاتُ القَلْبِ حَتَّى تَوَلَّتِ

فَلَيْتُ قَلوصي عِنْدَ عَزَّةِ قَيَّدَت بِحَبْلٍ ضَعيفٍ بانَ مِنْها فَضَلَّتِ

وَأَصْبَحَ في القَوْمِ المُقيمينِ رَحْلُها وَكانَ لَها باغٍ سِوايَ فَبَلَّتِ

فَقُلْتُ لَها ياعَزّ كُلُّ مُصيبةٍ إذا وُطِّنَتْ يَوما لَها النَّفسُ ذَلَّتِ

أَسيئي بنا أو أَحسِني، لا مَلومةٌ لَدَينا وَلا مَقْلِيَّةٌ إن تَقلتِ

هَنيئًا مَريئًا غير داءٍ مُخامِرٍ لِعَزَّةِ مِن أَعراضِنا ما اسْتَحَلَّتِ

تَمَنَّيْتُها حَتَّى إذا ما رَأَيْتُها رَأَيْتُ المَنايا شُرَّعًا قَد أَظَلَّتِ

كأني أُنادي صَخْرَةً حين أَعْرَضَتْ مِن الصُّمِ لو تمشي بها العُصْمُ زَلَّتِ

صَفوحًا فَما تَلقاكَ إلا بَخيلةً فَمَن مَلَّ مِنْها ذلك الوَصْلَ مَلَّتِ

أَصابَ الرَدَى من كانَ يهوى لكِ الرَّدَى وَجُنَّ اللواتي قُلْنَ عَزَّةُ جُنَّتِ

express his subjective experience. Kuthayyir's love for ʿAzza does not express itself in praise or flattering images; rather, he expresses his love as pain. This pain leads him to tears and his heart to pang; it also seems to drive his criticism of her choice in settling down with a jealous tyrant, as well as her cold and slippery nature. He also declares that he derives a kind of strength from this pain, such that he is able to show her mercy despite her hatefulness and feels healthy and satiated, unintoxicated by his love. Through this range of emotion, he expresses his love for ʿAzza. The power of his expression of love derives not from any overtness but instead from its implicitness in his play with conventions of ʿ*udhrī* poetry, such as grief and criticism. In the face of accusations of "insincerity" in love, this verse functions not to defend Kuthayyir's love but to express his humanity.

Iṣfahānī follows this expression of Kuthayyir's humanity, after two intermediary *akhbār*, with a set of *akhbār* from those who claim Kuthayyir was lying about his love for ʿAzza. His direct narrative voice makes a rare appearance to introduce the narrators of these *akhbār* to come as: "Those who mentioned that Kuthayyir was lying about his love"[150] (Iṣfahānī 9: 41). The two reports that follow relate: "Abū Khalīfa said Ibn Sallām told us: Kuthayyir was pretending and was not in love; Jamīl was truthful in his passion and love"[151] and "Aḥmad bin ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Jawharī and Ḥabīb bin Naṣr al-Mahlabī

[150] Original text:

من ذكر أن كثيرا كان يكذب في عشقه

[151] Original text:

told us that Umar bin Shabba said to us that Isḥāq bin Ibrāhīm claimed (*zaʿama*) that he heard Abū Ubayda saying: Jamīl was sincere in his love, and Kuthayyir was lying"[152] (Iṣfahānī 9: 41). These voices relate suspicion about Kuthayyir's professed feelings for ʿAzza and compare Kuthayyir's "insincerity" with Jamīl's "sincerity." Iṣfahānī's presentation of these *akhbār* as part of a group that mention "that Kuthayyir was lying about his love," however, invites suspicion not about Kuthayyir's love but instead about the claims of these narrators.

Rather than first presenting an illustrative anecdote that dramatizes Kuthayyir's "insincerity," such as the one that eventually follows, Iṣfahānī begins with declarations of that alleged "insincerity." After Kuthayyir's compelling verse, which never actually professes love for ʿAzza but instead expresses love, these blunt, accusatory declarations prove rather impotent in negating Kuthayyir's persuasive expression of love. Furthermore, the *isnād* introducing each of these declarations cast doubt upon their credibility. The *isnād* of the first *khabar* includes two contemporaries of Iṣfahānī who simply declare Kuthayyir a liar. Without a chain of transmission leading to a narrator who might have met or known Kuthayyir, these judgments of Iṣfahānī's contemporaries Abū Khalīfa (d.

أخبرنا أبو خليفة قال حدثنا ابن سلام قال: كان كثير مدعيا ولم يكن عاشقا، وكان جميل صادق الصبابة والعشق.

[152] Original text:

أخبرنا أحمد بن عبد العزيز الجوهري وحبيب بن نصر المهلبي قالا حدثنا عمر بن شبة قال زعم إسحاق بن إبراهيم أنه سمع أبا عبيدة يقول كان جميل يصدق في حبه، وكلن كثير يكذب.

917) Ibn Sallām (d. 846) are rather unpersuasive. The second *isnād* also complicates the judgment it introduces, specifically by employing the verb "he claimed" (*zaʿama*). This verb, unlike the verbs we usually find in the *isnād* of the *Aghānī* and other *akhbār* books, such as "he said" (*qāla*) or "he reported" *(akhabara*), implies some sense of doubt in what is being reporting. Lane's Lexicon, for example, relates that *zaʿama* is "mostly used in relation to thing respecting which there is doubt,…and which is not certainly known…or it is mostly used in relation to that which is false, or that respecting which there is doubt, or suspicion" (1232). It is not Kuthayyir, then, who emerges as insincere, but rather the narrators of the claims that he was.

The illustrative anecdote that we do eventually encounter directly following these two declarations comes with the direct intervention of Iṣfahānī's narrative voice. Instead of presenting an *isnād* as introduction, Iṣfahānī explains that "what follows is what we found in the reports but have not heard from anyone"[153] (Iṣfahānī 9: 41). This curious preface seems to suggest that Iṣfahānī found "what follows" in written, unnamed reports, despite the fact that he quite often cites the written sources upon which he relies, and that he found no direct oral sources that converge with what he found in these written reports. Nonetheless, Iṣfahānī includes this rather lengthy anecdote in his narration of the Kuthayyir ʿAzza legend, leaving the audience uncertain about how to approach it but, with the curiousness of the preface, eager to listen further.

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[153] Original text:

ومما وجدناه في أخباره ولم نسمعه من أحد

According to the story, Kuthayyir noticed ʿAzza one day while she was walking with a swagger and wearing a niqab. Not recognizing her, he followed her and said: "My lady, stop so I can talk to you. I've never seen any woman like you before"[154] (Iṣfahānī 9: 41). When ʿAzza asked him whether ʿAzza had left him wanting someone else, he responded, "I swear, if ʿAzza were my mother, she would grant you as a gift to me"[155] (Iṣfahānī 9: 41-42). ʿAzza scolded him and revealed her face, leaving Kuthayyir speechless and pale. After she left, Kuthayyir recited:

If only before I said what I said the poison

Of crushed cantharides had been mixed with my water

And I died without her knowing I betrayed her

How many who request winnings are not winners?

I acknowledge my fault that I have wronged her

And that I will not reveal the rest of her secrets[156] (Iṣfahānī 9: 42)

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[154] Original text:

يا سيدتي قفي حتى أكلمك فاني لم أر مثلك قط

[155] Original text:

بأبي أنت والله لو أن عزة أمة لي لوهبتها لك.

[156] Original text:

ألا لَيتني قَبْلَ الذي قُلتُ شيبَ لي مِن السَّمِ جَدْحاتٌ بماءِ الذَّرَارِحِ

فَمُتُّ ولَم تعلم علـيَّ خيانةً وَكَم طالبٍ للربحِ ليس بِرابِحِ

أبوءُ بذنبي إنني قد ظلمتُـها وإنني بباقي سِرِّها غيرُ بـائِحِ

This *isnād*-less *khabar* narrates a story in which Kuthayyir mistakes ʿAzza for a stranger and approaches her flirtatiously, demonstrating to her that he has not recognized her in her niqab. When ʿAzza scolds him and reveals herself, Kuthayyir turns pale and speechless until he recites verse in which he admits and expresses great regret about his betrayal of ʿAzza. There is no chain of authority supporting this story, whose "authority" lies in its entertainment value. It has subjective "truth value" inasmuch as it is worth repeating. Its mere utterance awakens doubts about Kuthayyir's "sincerity" and provides an anecdotal basis for the claims of his disingenuousness, while also suggesting, however, that it is the only basis for those claims we encountered. Meanwhile, Iṣfahānī allows Kuthayyir's poetic expression of guilt and regret to conclude the story, which once again reveals his humanity. Iṣfahānī's arrangement of the *akhbār* demands a reception of the subjective truths they suggest, wherein the audience becomes sensitive to the subjectivity offered by each voice in the layers of voices he presents for each utterance, as well as their own. In calling the audience's attention to and disrupting the mechanisms which might seem to enable it to distinguish supposedly true and false statements, the *Aghānī* deterritorializes the Kuthayyir legend and invites it to participate in a process of knowledge production that is more egalitarian and contextually contingent.

RESURRECTING THE SCAPEGOAT

After presenting thirty-six pages of overwhelmingly censorious *akhbār* that frame Kuthayyir as supposedly "disingenuous" and socially "inappropriate," Iṣfahānī offers *akhbār* relating to Kuthayyir's death, funeral, and legacy. These *akhbār*, which I present

here without *isnād*, suddenly reframe Kuthayyir not only as beloved and admired, but also as something of a venerated prophet:

> (1) Some of Kuthayyir's people cried when death befell him. Kuthayyir said to them: Don't cry, as if after forty nights, you will hear my soles on the street coming back to you.[157] (Iṣfahānī 9: 47)
>
> (2) Kuthayyir and ʿIkrima of Ibn ʿAbbās on the same day, so the Quraysh tribe gathered at Kuthayyir's funeral and there was no one to carry ʿIkrima's body.[158] (9: 47)
>
> (3) ʿIkrima of Ibn ʿAbbās and Kuthayyir bin ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Khuzāʿī, ʿAzza's companion, died on the same day in the year 105. I saw them both prayed upon together on the same day in the afternoon in the funerary place. The people said: Today the most knowledgeable of people and the most expressive of people died.[159] (9: 47)

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[157] Original text:

بكى بعض أهل كثير عليه حين نزل به الموت. فقال له كثير: لا تبك، فكأنك بي بعد أربعين ليلة تسمع خشفة نعلى من تلك الشعبة راجعا إليكم.

[158] Original text:

مات كثير وعكرمة مولى ابن عباس في يوم واحد، فاجتمعت قريش في جنازة كثير، ولم يوجد لعكرمة من يحمله.

[159] Original text:

(4) ʿIkrima and Kuthayyir ʿAzza died on the same day. When their funeral processions began, I didn't hear of any woman or man in the city who stayed behind. He said: It was said: Today the most expressive of people and most knowledgeable of people died. He said: The woman were overcome with sorrowful tears and mentioned ʿAzza in their dirges for him. Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad bin ʿAlī[160] said: They sent me off to Kuthayyir's funeral to promote it. He said: We started pushing the women away from it [the funeral] and Muḥammad bin ʿAlī started to hit them with his sleeve: Bow down, Companions of Yūsuf! One of the women stepped up to him and said: Son of God's Messenger, you are right! We are the Companions of Yūsuf, and we were better to him than you were. He said: When he left, she was brought to him like a spark of fire. Muḥammad bin ʿAlī said to her: Are you the one saying that you are better to Yūsuf than us? She said: Yes! Will you guarantee me protection from your anger, Son of God's Messenger? He said: You are safe from my anger, go ahead! She said: We, Son of God's Messenger, invited him to the pleasures of eating, drinking, enjoyment, and delight. You

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مات عكرمة مولى ابن عباس وكثير بن عبد الرحمن الخزاعي صاحب عزة في يوم واحد في سنة خمس ومائة، فرأيتهما جميعا صلي عليهما في يوم واحد بعد الظهر في موضع الجنائز، فقال الناس: مات اليوم أفقه الناس وأشعر الناس.

[160] Muḥammad bin ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn bin al-Ḥusayn al-Ṭālibī al-Hāshimī al-Qurayshī (d. 732) is the fifth Imam of Twelver Shi'ism.

are communities of men who threw him in the pit and sold him for the cheapest prices and then you threw him in jail. So, which of us was kinder and more merciful to him? Muḥammad said: How generous are you! A woman that is challenged can only win. Then he said to her: Do you have a husband (*baʿl*)[161]? She said: I have from men for whom I am the husband. He said: Abū Jaʿfar said: You are right! One such as you is one who owns her husband rather than being owned by him. He said: When she left, a man from the tribe said: This is Zaynab bint Muʿayqib.[162] (9: 47-8)

[161] As in "master"

[162] Original text:

مات عكرمة وكثير عزة في يوم واحد، فأخرجت جنازتاهما، فما علمت تخلفت امرأة بالمدينة ولا رجل عن جنازتيهما. قال: وقيل مات اليوم أشعر الناس وأعلم الناس. قال: وغلب النساء على جنازة كثير يبكينه ويذكرن عزة في ندبتهن له. قال: فقال أبو جعفر محمد بن علي: افرجوا لي عن جنازة كثير لأرفها. قال: فجعلنا ندفع عنها النساء وجعل يضربهن محمد بن علي بكمه ويقول: تنحين يا صواحبات يوسف. فانتدبت له امرأة منهن فقالت: يا بن رسول الله لقد صدقت، إنا لصواحبات يوسف وقد كنا له خير منكم له. قال: فقال: أبو جعفر لبعض مواليه: احتفظ بها حتى تجيئني بها إذا انصرفنا. قال: فلما انصرف أتي بتلك المرأة كأنها شرارة النار. فقال لها محمد بن علي: أنت القائلة إنكن ليوسف خير منا؟ قالت: نعم تؤمنني غضبك يا بن رسول الله؟ قال: أنت آمنة من غضبي فأبيني. قالت: نحن يا بن رسول الله دعوناه إلى اللذات من المطعم والمشرب والتمتع والتنعم، وأنتم يا معشر الرجال ألقيتموه في الجب وبعتموه بأبخس الأثمان وحبستموه في السجن. فأينا كان عليه أحنى وبه أرأف ؟ فقال محمد: لله درك ولن تغالب

We find no trace of the negative sentiments toward Kuthayyir with which Iṣfahānī has bombarded us in these final pages of "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi." In the first of these *akhbār*, the prospect of his death is met with sorrow. We find people crying beside Kuthayyir's deathbed, and Kuthayyir speaks to his mourners as a prophet promising his resurrection from the dead: "after forty nights, you will hear my soles on the street coming back to you" (Iṣfahānī 9: 47). His promise of returning after death recalls the promise of Jesus' resurrection and eventual final return as well as the prophesied return of Mahdī, an intertextual link that also recalls "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir." Similarly, Kuthayyir's reference to forty nights recalls the length of time Mūsā spent on Mount Sinai when he received the ten commandments as well as the time Jesus spent fasting in the desert, here recalling the story of Qays bin Dharīḥ's period of resistance in "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi." Although we had encountered Kuthayyir claiming to be the reincarnation of Jonah in the earlier *akhbār*, the narrators here do not stage these allusions to prophets as a character's claim to prophesy. Rather, they infuse the narrative with this heightened language. He is still the same self-aggrandizing Kuthayyir on his deathbed, but the audience is no longer alone in granting Kuthayyir understanding in his grandiose sense of self.

إمراة إلا غلبت. ثم قال لها: ألك بعل؟ قالت: لي من الرجال من أنا بعله. قال: فقال أبو جعفر: صدقت، مثلك من تملك بعلها ولا يملكها. قال: فلما انصرفت قال رجل من القوم: هذه زينب بنت معيقب.

The second, third, and fourth of these *akhbār* relate the coincidence of Kuthayyir's death with that of the well-respected *faqīh* (Islamic scholar) ʿIkrima of Ibn ʿAbbās, a coincidence which links them and suggests their equal status in their respective fields. The first relates that Kuthayyir's funeral was so well-attended that no one was left to carry ʿIkrima's body in his funeral procession, while the other two relate that both funerals were well-attended, as their deaths represented the deaths of "the most expressive" and "the most knowledgeable" of people. The fourth proceeds to dramatize the great adoration that the women of the city in particular expressed for Kuthayyir. This adoration is performed through a discussion of the women's devotion to the prophet Yūsuf, who serves as an allusion to Kuthayyir. Yūsuf's legendary good looks made him irresistible to women, and we find Kuthayyir similarly irresistible to women here, despite his famously bad looks.

Iṣfahānī concludes "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi" with a *khabar* praising the ability of Kuthayyir's poetry to move one to an ecstatic loss of self control (*ṭarab*). In it, the architect and famed singer ʿUmar al-Wādī recounts hearing someone singing Kuthayyir's poetry, poetry he had "never heard the likes of before," causing him to nearly fall off his camel in ecstasy (*ṭarab*).[163] Having begun with unequivocal criticism of

[163] I almost fell off my camel in ecstasy (*ṭarab*). I said: By God I would give one of my limbs to have access to this voice. I set off in its direction, which turned out to be coming from a sheep herder. I asked him to repeat the verses for me. He said: Yes! If I had with me something to have you recite from, I would not repeat it and instead make it your reci-

Kuthayyir's appearance and character, the chapter ends with unequivocal praise of his poetic skill and legacy. In death, Kuthayyir receives the admiration, respect, and sympathy that people denied him in life—he is revered by women as Yūsuf and respected by people, even the likes of ʿUmar al-Wādī, for his poetic ability, and his death is mourned by the people of the city at least as much as ʿIkrima.

CONCLUSION

The story of Kuthayyir ʿAzza in the *Aghānī* is not the story of a man who pretended to love a woman named ʿAzza but the story of a man who claimed to love a woman named ʿAzza and whose love for her was doubted. The question of his "sincerity" is left open, as is the judgment of his manners and behaviors. "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi" calls upon its audience, like the "rhizomatic" text as conceptualized by

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tation. When I sing it while hungry, I am satiated, while thirsty, I am quenched, while lonely, I find company, while lazy, I am energized. He said: So he repeated them to me until I took possession of them, and I took nothing else but those verses with me when I entered the city. (Iṣfahānī 9: 50)

Original text:

فكدت أسقط عن راحلتي طربا، وقلت: والله لألتمسن الوصول إلى هذا الصوت ولو بذهاب عضو من أعضائي، فتيممت سمته فإذا راع في غنم، فسألته إعادته عليه. قال: نعم ولو حضرني قرى أقريكه ما أعدته، ولكني أجعله قراك، فربما ترنمت به وأنا غرثان فأشبع، وعطشان فأروى، ومستوحش فآنس، وكسلان فأنشط. قال: فأعادهما عليه حتى أخذتهما، فما كان زادي حتى ولجت المدينة غيرهما.

Deleuze and Guattari, to approach this openness not only by engaging in the process of knowledge production it allows by also by maintaining its openness in doing so.

The "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi" foregrounds the subjective experiences and responses of its characters, narrators, and audiences, roles whose boundaries are themselves blurred. Iṣfahānī confronts us as an audience with the extensive invective and sarcasm narrators and characters direct at Kuthayyir throughout the chapter, which he often follows with a poetic response from Kuthayyir's mouth. This foregrounding of subjective responses provokes us to add our own voices in responding to the text and participate in the production of knowledge, while also becoming aware of our vulnerabilities, setting us up to sympathize with the much-mocked Kuthayyir. Indeed, Iṣfahānī stages truth as contextually and socially contingent. We find no authoritative figure nor communal consensus from which an objective truth can be imagined. Iṣfahānī's curating of the *akhbār* emphasizes communal practices that place a premium on artful, performative renderings of people and events. Furthermore, Iṣfahānī's treatment of the doubts surrounding Kuthayyir's "sincerity" offers deception as a force that counterbalances the tyranny of authoritative knowledge.

As tenth-century Arabo-Islamic society experienced the decentralization of authority and the increased influence of the middle strata of society (Ali, "Abbasid Public Sphere"), akhbār texts continued to reevaluate the process of knowledge production and accepted behavior norms. With the spread of *adab* culture, the courts no longer had a monopoly on these social practices and more individuals had access to participate in them (Ali, Abbasid Public Sphere 475-476), bringing along with them their own notions of

norms and mores. The Kuthayyir ʿAzza story in the *Aghānī* promotes relative truths produced through social practices by suggesting that truth has been relative and socially produced since the advent of Islam. With new political leaders and alliances, as well as new colleagues to contend with at social gatherings, knowing whom one could trust became particularly crucial for political, social, and financial success in the tenth century. The Kuthayyir ʿAzza story in the *Aghānī* reflects the anxieties and fears around the possibility of deception and distortion of the truth in the new social and political configurations of the time.

Questions about how to deal with ugly, lying "trolls" like Kuthayyir have raised similar anxieties and fears expressed in current debates in America about social practices on the internet, from comment threads to viral stories, as well as political practices, such as political campaigns. While Iṣfahānī's retelling of the Kuthayyir ʿAzza story reflects a community with similar concerns, it offers an alternative perspective toward them. Rather than advocating the elimination of such social practices to avoid distorting the truth and threatening the authority of hosts, Iṣfahānī's text points to "ugly trolls" like Kuthayyir as constant reminders of the relativity of truth, not the cause of its relativity. The curation of *akhbār* in the *Aghānī* exploits Kuthayyir's many apparent faults to earn sympathy for the flawed, talented poet. In the face of criticism and accusations of "insincerity" and deception, his poetry is allowed to speak for itself and speak for him, suggesting a role for judgments based on evaluations of artfulness and skill in poetically rendering a subjective defense of truths.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have presented approaches to the *Aghānī* that attempt to open up the text beyond the bounds of either/or binaries that have tended to dominate its reception in modern scholarship. In attending to Iṣfahānī's curation of *akhbār*, *isnād*, and poetry, I have offered receptions of the *Aghānī*'s chapters devoted to four *ʿudhrī* love poets that engage with the text's performance of these stories as open, malleable, and unsettled.

Throughout the dissertation, I engage with Bakhtin's theory of "dialogism" to suggest that Iṣfahānī's orchestration of voices in these chapters urge the audience to participate in his performance of the stories of these tragic love poets. The layered multivoicedness of Iṣfahānī's *Kitāb al-Aghānī* invites a reception in which the audience finds itself implicated in the stakes of these stories. The many voices of these four chapters of the *Aghānī* raise a variety of questions salient to human experience, and I have pointed to those that I articulate as questions about "madness," "authenticity," and "sincerity." Like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome, Iṣfahānī's *Aghānī*, as with many *akhbār* texts, has multiple entryways and exits and foregrounds processes, relations, and happenings. As such, the *Aghānī* opens up relationships of reciprocity with its audience. The text provokes its audience to confront its own human experience and transfer the affects the confrontation produces back onto the text. The story of Majnūn Laylā in the *Aghānī* invites us into and opens up madness, leaves us muddled, and provokes us to a kind of mad wonder. In the

Aghānī's Qays Lubnā story, Iṣfahānī betrays and exposes our expectations of finality, cohesion, and a rationality free from madness. Meanwhile, Dhū 'l-Rumma's rootedness as a Bedouin and thus the very notion of "authenticity" frays and unravels in Iṣfahānī's narration of the story of the poet "with the frayed rope." Then, the story of Kuthayyir ʿAzza in the *Aghānī* invites us to reconsider "sincerity" and to confront our human vulnerabilities by inspiring our sympathy for an ugly, lying extremist.

In entering into a conversation with and among these four *Aghānī* chapters, I have attended to the nuances of Iṣfahānī's staging of a range of possible articulations of human experiences that free the text from the binds of either/or binaries. I have sought to engage with the way in which Iṣfahānī raises these question about "madness," "authenticity," and "sincerity" through his curation of *akhbār* by considering the performative impact of the *Aghānī*'s openness, malleability, and unsettledness. In Chapter 1, "Iṣfahānī's Invitation to Madness in the Story of Majnūn Laylā," I suggest that by confronting us with unresolving narrative divergence, Iṣfahānī's lengthy introduction to the Majnūn Laylā romance in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu" stages Majnūn as an enigma and invites us to madness. In particular, this confrontation with the unfamiliar provokes a kind of mad wonder (*ʿajab*) in the audience, which reenacts Majnūn's pursuit of his unattainable beloved Laylā in its parallel pursuit of the unattainable madman/Majnūn. As I suggest in Chapter 2 "A Touch of Something: The Story of Majnūn Laylā." if we respond to this invitation to madness in "Akhbār Majnūn Banī ʿĀmir wa Nasabuhu," we find that madness itself opens up. In becoming mad, we join a boundless world of madmen and madness. When being infected with madness—which Iṣfahānī stages as an unstable marker of

counter-normativity (*lawtha*)—becomes the norm, we must reconsider cultural normativities. In Chapter 3, "Problematizing Rationality in Iṣfahānī's Qays Lubnā Narrative," I suggest that the *Aghānī*'s presentation of the Qays Lubnā story in "Dhikr Qays bin Dharīḥ wa Nasabihi wa Akhbārihi" dramatizes the breakdown of normative expectations. By arranging *akhbār* into a collective narrative, Iṣfahānī stages the coherence and causality presumed in "rationality" as inevitably unsustainable.

In Chapter 4, "Reframing the 'Authenticity' of Dhū 'l-Rumma in the *Aghānī*," I suggest that the "authenticity" at stake in "Dhikr Dhī 'l-Rumma wa Khabarihi" is that of the poet's rootedness (*aṣāla*), particularly his rootedness as a Bedouin, which takes on existential importance for Arabic poetry (*al-shiʿr*) and the burgeoning Arabo-Islamic culture in both the 8th and 10th centuries. Iṣfahānī presents *akhbār* that frustrate attempts at getting at an evaluation of the "authenticity" of Dhū 'l-Rumma's Bedouinness. In doing so, he stages rootedness as a Bedouin as inevitably unrooted or of many roots. This unrootedness and multi-rootedness of Bedouin "authenticity" lift the "seal" from his poetry and thus Arabic poetry in general. In Chapter 5, "Sincerity in the Story of Kuthayyir ʿAzza," I also consider the implications of what is at stake in Iṣfahānī's curation of *akhbār* for Umayyad and Abbasid societies. In particular, I suggest that in "Dhikr Akhbār Kuthayyir wa Nasabihi," Iṣfahānī stages the poet's "sincerity" as the prevailing concern of the many, layered voices of narrators and characters of the lore and calls the notion of "sincerity" into question.

Because I have so focused my gaze in this dissertation upon Iṣfahānī's *Aghānī*, my admiration for the text and Iṣfahānī's role as curator of it is undoubtedly quite evident.

What is likely much less evident is my view that the *Aghānī* is not a particularly exceptional *akhbār* text in terms of its openness to receptions that engage with its performance of knowledge as open, malleable, and unsettled. I would like to emphasize here, then, that *akhbār* texts as a genus and as products of a culture of performance, i.e., *adab* culture, tend to stage knowledge as such. In attending to *akhbārī*s' curation of *akhbār*, *isnād*, and poetry in other so-called reference works, we are likely to encounter novel approaches to literature and its relationship with the world that embrace seemingly diverse fields of knowledge and human experience as overlapping and evolving.

More precisely, my hope is that in this dissertation I have pointed to a conversation with the *Aghānī* that invites us to reconsider our expectations of and approach to not only *akhbār* texts and premodern Arabic literature but also perhaps our expectations of and approach to literature in general and our own interactions with and experiences of the world.

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